

THE EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUAL COPING
AMONG ADULT WOMEN SURVIVORS
OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
In the Department of Educational Psychology
and Special Education
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

by
Angela Dawn Wiebe

© Copyright Angela Dawn Wiebe, November, 2011 All Rights Reserved

PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis/dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis/dissertation in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis/dissertation work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis/dissertation or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis. Requests for permission to copy or to make other uses of materials in this thesis/dissertation in whole or part should be addressed to:

Department Head
Educational Psychology and Special Education
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5X1

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the lived experiences of spiritual coping among adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). It has recently been suggested that the research on the adjustment of CSA survivors be broadened to include new aspects of coping, as well as the processes that promote resilience. Studies have only recently started to examine how religious and/or spiritual coping impact adjustment to significant life events including illness, death of a child, and terrorist events. However, very few empirical studies have specifically investigated the role of spiritual coping in relation to CSA. Spirituality has been found to be a protective factor for the development of various psychological problems such as the development of depression, shame, and interpersonal difficulties. For some CSA survivors, spirituality or religion has been found to be a factor in resilience and healing.

Giorgi's Empirical Phenomenological Approach guided the exploration of the lived experience of women who have experienced spiritual coping in relation to healing from their CSA. Three women between the ages of 45 and 48 were recruited through purposeful sampling and data were generated through in-depth interviews. The data was analyzed following the empirical phenomenological approach and generated five invariants and an essential structure. The invariants that emerged were: *"Innately Bad:" Blame and Responsibility*; *"Living a Lie:" Confronting Hypocrisy*; *"Wandering the Wilderness:" Searching*; *"Worm to Butterfly:" Transformation*; *"Bringing Me to Shore:" Support*. The implications of the invariants and essential structure as well as considerations for future research and for mental health professionals are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank first and foremost the women who had the strength and courage to revisit the past and talk openly and candidly about your very personal and painful experiences of childhood sexual abuse. Your willingness to share your stories is what made this study possible. Thank you for allowing me a window into your lives; it was an honour and privilege to be welcomed into your private worlds. Your strength and courage continually inspires me!

Without the support of important people in my life, I would never have accomplished this dream of completing my master's. I am forever grateful for your belief and faith in me. Thank you to my Supervisor, Dr. Stephanie Martin: you supported me through the entirety of my academic career, and specifically my research process. Your mentorship, expertise, wisdom, and insight were invaluable to me! You were also there to celebrate my pregnancy with me by crying tears of joy, and you shed tears of sorrow with me as I said good-bye to my daughter. Thank you for your profound caring!

Thank you to my Committee members: Dr. Laureen McIntyre and Dr. Jennifer Nicol for your careful and thoughtful reviews, comments, and suggestions. Thank you also to Dr. Lee Murray my External Examiner for your willingness to become involved in this research journey. I appreciated the honesty that all three of you provided as well as your thought-provoking comments which, spurred conversation and points for further discussion. I am so grateful for the encouragement that you provided me.

Thank you for the support and encouragement from my EdPsych girls. I feel honoured and privileged to be apart of this very talented and beautiful group of women! A special thank you to my friend Angela (Wiebe) Thorpe for supporting me through many thesis working days, for encouraging me to keep putting one foot in front of the other, and for being my personal copy editor. Thank you also for your constant prayers for focus, insight, and productivity.

To my entire family – both Anonson and Wiebe – for believing in me and cheering me on, but especially to my mom who inspired me to strive for higher education. You are a model of the kind of woman I aspire to be, and you were always available for research talk and advice. Thank you mom and dad, for always leaving your doors open to me, for a quiet and serene place to think and write. Countless thanks to my brother-in-law, Tyler for being willing and available for 24/7 tech support whenever I needed it.

To my Rock and my husband Andrew: thank you for realizing and supporting this dream. You have walked every step of this journey with me and have continually encouraged and supported me throughout. Your unending love, understanding, and patience has never ceased to amaze me and I love you so very much for it. We did it!!! At last...

Finally, and most importantly, thanks be to God for giving me the strength I needed to make it through, and for carrying me when I did not have the strength.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work of love in memory of my precious daughter Eleanor Rae who was only here for a moment in time. Your life began and ended during this journey, but you were my motivation to complete this chapter of life and begin a new one. I carried you for part of this research, but you have carried me to completion. You took a piece of my heart with you but I know that you are watching over me as my guardian angel, and that I will one day hold you again...this time for eternity. I miss you with every breath I take baby Ellie, and I will love you forever. Today is one day closer...

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to all those who are surviving from their experience of childhood sexual abuse. My prayer is that this study helps give you some hope and strength through the courage and insight of others.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose of the Study	1
Researcher Interest	3
Note on Terminology	5
Defining Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA).....	5
Defining Victim versus Survivor.....	5
Defining Spirituality	5
Defining Spiritual Coping.....	6
Defining Feminist Perspective.....	6
Thesis Overview	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Feminist Perspective	7
Childhood Sexual Abuse	8
Defining Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA).....	8
Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse.....	9
Long-Term Effects (Sequelae) of Child Sexual Abuse	11
Interpersonal/Psychosocial Affects of Child Sexual Abuse	13
Gender Differences.....	13
Diverse Effects of Child Sexual Abuse	16
Coping and Resiliency	17
Current State of Research on Spirituality/Religion	20
Spirituality as a Resiliency Resource.....	21
Spiritual Coping	23
Patterns of Spiritual Coping (Positive and Negative).....	24
<i>Positive spiritual coping</i>	24
<i>Negative spiritual coping</i>	25
Spiritual Outcomes	27
<i>Positive spiritual outcomes</i>	28
<i>Negative spiritual outcomes</i>	29

Summary.....	31
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	32
Methodological Framework.....	32
Qualitative Research	32
<i>Researcher paradigm.....</i>	33
<i>Assumptions and biases.....</i>	34
<i>Ontology.....</i>	34
<i>Epistemology.....</i>	34
<i>Subjectivity.....</i>	35
Empirical (Descriptive) Phenomenology.....	35
Feminist Research Perspective	37
Research Participants.....	39
Purposeful sampling	39
Recruitment criteria	39
Participant Recruitment	40
Demographics	41
Data Generation.....	41
Phenomenological Reduction or ‘Epoché’	42
Interviews (description of an experience).....	43
<i>Research relationship</i>	46
Data Analysis.....	47
Reading for a Sense of the Whole	50
Identifying Meaning Units.....	50
Assessing Meaning Units.....	52
Synthesizing Meaning Units	53
Quality Criteria.....	54
Credibility	54
<i>Member checking.....</i>	55
<i>Peer review/debriefing.....</i>	55
<i>Audit trail.....</i>	56
<i>Positionality</i>	56
Transferability.....	56
Dependability.....	57
Ethical Considerations	57
Informed Consent	57
Impacts of the Research: Caring for Participants and Self-Care	58
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	60
Situated Descriptions.....	61
Marie.....	61
Janet	62
Dawn.....	62
Invariant Meanings.....	63
“‘Innately Bad:’ Blame and Responsibility	65
<i>Self-blame</i>	65

<i>Blame from others</i>	67
“Living a Lie:” Confronting Hypocrisy	69
<i>Patriarchy</i>	69
<i>Suppression</i>	72
“Honour thy Father.”	73
<i>Betrayal</i>	76
“Wandering the Wilderness:” Searching	78
<i>Questioning</i>	78
<i>Exploration</i>	80
“Worm to Butterfly:” Transformation	82
<i>Personalization</i>	82
<i>Coping Behaviours</i>	86
<i>Forgiveness/Letting Go</i>	88
<i>Sweats</i>	89
<i>Prayer</i>	90
<i>Hail Mary</i>	91
<i>Burning Incense/Sage</i>	91
<i>Smudging</i>	91
<i>Speaking in Tongues</i>	92
“Bringing Me to Shore:” Support	92
<i>Connection/Relationship</i>	93
<i>Acceptance</i>	97
Essential Structure	100
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	104
Discussion of the Invariants and Essential Structure	105
“Innately Bad:” Blame and Responsibility	105
“Living a Lie:” Confronting Hypocrisy	106
“Wandering the Wilderness:” Searching	108
“Worm to Butterfly:” Transformation	110
“Bringing Me to Shore:” Support	111
Essential Structure	113
Strengths and Limitations	114
Considerations For Future Research	116
Considerations For Mental Health Professionals	118
Personal Reflection	120
REFERENCES	125
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT POSTER #1	142
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT POSTER #2	143
APPENDIX C: TELEPHONE SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPATION CRITERIA	144
APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHICS FORM	145

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM	146
APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW #1 GUIDE.....	149
APPENDIX G: REFERRAL HANDOUT	150
APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW #2 GUIDE	151
APPENDIX I: DATA/TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM.....	152

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3 – 1 Meaning-unit analysis.....	51
--	----

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3 – 1 Flowchart Demonstrating the Steps of Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method.....	49
Figure 4 – 1 Representation of the Relationship Between Invariants and the Essential Structure of Spiritual Coping Among Adult Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse.....	64
Figure 4 – 2 Coherent Unity of the Experience of Spiritual Coping Among Adult Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse.....	103

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Child sexual abuse is an important social, political, and mental health problem (Oddone Paolucci, Genuis, & Violato, 2001) which requires immediate research attention because of the devastating effects it may have on individual adjustment. The purpose of the present study was to explore the lived experience and essence of spirituality as a coping resource among adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Although religious coping has been recently studied in the United States by Nkongho (2006) with adolescent girls who have been sexually abused, there are no studies examining spiritual coping among adult women. With a dearth of qualitative research in this area, it is appropriate that a deeper examination and understanding of individual experience be explored through a phenomenological inquiry.

Phenomenology, a qualitative research approach, is an appropriate methodology for examining this inquiry as it allows for a rich and descriptive understanding of the issue from the perspective of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, and places their experience at the centre of the inquiry. Specifically, empirical (descriptive) phenomenology was chosen as it examines the descriptions of experience given by participants, and views these descriptions as truthful. Empirical (descriptive) phenomenology seeks to describe a phenomena as it is experienced, rather than explain the phenomena (Langdridge, 2007). Langdridge (2007) explained that “this results in (i) a focus on first-person accounts of experience, (ii) an analysis that seeks to discern the underlying structure of an experience and (iii) the production of findings that describe both the universal structure (essence) of the experience and individual idiosyncratic meanings” (p. 86).

Ganje-Fling, McCarthy Veach, Kuang, and Houg (2000) suggested that “qualitative methods may yield a richer picture of sexual abuse survivors’ spirituality and how obstacles such as anger, guilt, and distrust affect their spiritual functioning” (p. 90). Recent research by Houg (2008) examined *The Role of Spirituality in the Ongoing Recovery Process of Female Sexual Abuse Survivors*. Houg interviewed fourteen women who had been sexually abused in order to examine “the role that spirituality had in the women’s recovery process” (p. 129). She engaged in a consensual qualitative research method, whereas the method used for the present study will be phenomenology. Knapik, Martsof, and Draucker (2008) concurred that “little is known about the processes by which survivors of sexual violence respond spiritually to the violence they have

experienced” (p. 336). Additionally, recent research carried out by Gall, Basque, Damasceno-Scott, and Vardy (2007) resulted in recommendations that additional research be conducted “on the nature of spirituality that is relevant to adult survivors of CSA” and an exploration of “both the positive and negative aspects of survivors’ relationship with a higher power and their potential associations with various facets of well-being” (p. 115). To date, no research has presented an examination of the experience of all forms of spiritual coping; both positive and negative, relative to the experience of CSA. Therefore, the present study has attempted to address both.

The current status of the field of religion and spirituality is controversial as there is considerable overlap between the two concepts. As a result of this debate, there has been a move towards making a distinction between *religion* and *spirituality*. For the purposes of the present research, the term *spiritual coping* has been used as *spirituality* is generally thought to be a more inclusive and broader concept which could incorporate religion. *Spiritual coping* has been conceptualized from an adaptation of Koenig, Pargament, and Nielsen’s (1998) definition of religious coping, replacing the term *religious* with *spiritual*. Therefore, spiritual coping is “the use of spiritual beliefs or behaviours to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances” (Koenig et al., 1998, p. 513). However, research participants were given an opportunity to define spiritual coping as is appropriate for them.

The present research has several possible implications for the individual as well as society as a whole. Learning more about coping and the processes that assist survivors to manage difficult and traumatic experiences may assist mental health professionals to “be aware of the potential for positive change in their clients following trauma and adversity” (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p. 11). This information may also assist mental health professionals in applying the information they have learned and generalizing it to assist others who are having difficulty coping. The knowledge gained from this type of research may also assist mental health professionals in guiding discussions about spiritual coping and healing with survivors of CSA (Knapik et al., 2008), as spiritual (and religious) identity have been proposed by many researchers (i.e., Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996) to be as important in the therapeutic process as other aspects of personal identity and cultural diversity. As Hill et al. (2000) contended, “Many early prominent psychologists (e.g., Freud, James, Hall, etc.) and some more recent noted

psychologists (e.g., Allport, Jung, Fromm, Maslow, etc.) argued that religion or spirituality must be considered for a complete understanding of the person” (p. 53).

Spiritual coping can have mixed outcomes as it encompasses both positive and negative elements, and is therefore, “a complex process for adult survivors of CSA” (Gall, 2006, p. 838). Positive forms of spiritual coping have been related to the healthy development of individuals who have been impacted by stressful life events (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000), and may serve as a resource for many survivors. However, should survivors experience negative spiritual coping, spirituality may become a burden. Therefore the subject needs to be approached with sensitivity within the therapeutic alliance. The goal of the present study was to attempt to gain a better understanding of the experience of spiritual coping for women who have experienced CSA and to generate possible therapeutic implications for mental health care providers.

Researcher Interest

After I disclosed my own experience of CSA to my parents, we went through the process of reporting to the police, working with social workers, and health care professionals. When it came time to go to court, I was thoroughly prepared in advance. I was brought to the courthouse in order to be mentally and emotionally equipped for the court hearing and the events that would transpire. I was highly anxious about the whole process because of the fact that I would have to testify with the perpetrator (a close neighbour who was like a grandparent to me) sitting across the room. Although he would be behind a divider so that I would not have to face him, it was still anxiety-provoking for a little 8-year-old girl. After the preparation, I felt more confident and comfortable with the process, but still dreaded it with every fibre of my being. We had several family members come from great distances to support me. The night before the court hearing, my family and extended family members were standing around in our kitchen and we decided to form a prayer circle. By praying, my parents hoped that it would help decrease my anxiety about the events that were to take place the following day, as prayer had always been a source of comfort for me.

Although my immediate family members were regular *church-goers*, and had a strong faith, some of our extended family members did not. And so, we prayed for the first time in this unique group with family members who were not necessarily *believers* and who may not have ever prayed before. At the closing of the prayer, the phone rang literally within minutes and on the other end, my lawyer indicated that she had just received word from the defence lawyers who

let her know that the perpetrator had confessed and we would not have to go to court. What a relief and an answer to prayer! This experience strengthened my personal faith and has motivated me to cling to that for support and strength throughout the years. I find my faith and spirituality to be one of my main sources of support and coping. Although I have much support from family and friends, I know that God will always be there for me and that He hears me.

Haverkamp and Young (2007) claimed that “counselling psychology researchers, because of their significant clinical experience, may have direct experience of the phenomenon they are interested in researching. In many cases, it is direct experience that precipitates an interest in qualitative methods” (p. 286), and this is certainly the case with this particular research.

My own direct experiences led me to my research question. My work with the Healing Journey Project, in which I interviewed women who have had experiences of family violence, my volunteer experience at the University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre, and the Saskatoon Sexual Assault and Information Centre, and my undergraduate practicum with the Edmonton Police Services Child Protection Unit sensitized me to the importance of this area of research. As childhood sexual abuse is viewed as a woman’s issue due to the power differentials that exist between men and women in our culture (Webster & Dunn, 2005), I feel compelled to be involved in this research area.

The majority of women that had survived family violence, whom I had the privilege of interviewing through the healing journey project, spoke to some degree of the role of spirituality in their coping and healing process. This led me to question whether the same was true for survivors of CSA. Following a discussion with the previous director of Tamara’s House, a shelter for women survivors of CSA, she confirmed that she had continually and repeatedly come across this phenomena.

Given my own interest in spirituality and my personal faith which has carried me through the most difficult times in my life, I am drawn to and inspired to learn more about the stories of others, and to explore their experiences of spiritual coping. Spirituality and religion have been overlooked by counsellors and researchers for some time but these concepts are beginning to be recognized as important avenues of research and practice. Based on personal experience, I believe that spirituality is and can be a possible therapeutic resource that may facilitate healing experiences. I believe that spirituality can be a source of strength, support, comfort and solace for individuals as well as a positive way of coping. Therefore, I recognize that spirituality may be an

integral component of the healing process of CSA survivors. In addition, spirituality can: help counsellors to understand the context in which clients live as well as their worldviews; help clients grapple with questions about the purpose and meaning of life; and uncover problems or issues related to spirituality or religion (Frame, 2003).

Note on Terminology

Defining Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Determining a universal definition of CSA is very difficult and the definition is elaborated upon in chapter two. For the present study, Sanderson's (2006) definition of CSA has been adopted and is defined as:

the involvement of dependent children and adolescents in sexual activities with an adult or any person older or bigger, where there is a difference in age, size or power, in which the child is used as a sexual object for the gratification of the older person's needs, or desires, and to which the child is unable to give informed consent due to the imbalance of power or any mental or physical disability. This definition excludes consensual sexual activity between peers. (p. 25)

Defining Victim versus Survivor

Out of respect for women who have experienced CSA, the term *survivor* is used rather than *victim* as it is more empowering and recognizes their strength as survivors (Health Canada, 2004). The term *victim* is limiting as it discounts survivors' healthy and productive functioning (Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2002). In addition to the term *survivor*, *thrivor* is also used in the literature as it describes women who are not merely surviving, but also *flourishing*. The Public Health Agency of Canada (2002) suggested that the term *thrivor* is a better descriptor for women who have experienced CSA as it implies that the sexual abuse is an incident that occurs to people rather than being something that comprises the core of their identity. However, for the purposes of the present study, the term *survivor* will be used to refer to women who have experienced child sexual abuse as it is more commonly recognized in society and literature.

Defining Spirituality

Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) defined *spirituality* as:

a complex, multifaceted construct that involves ultimate and personal truths that individuals hold as inviolable in their lives. This definition of spirituality is broad enough

to incorporate religious, existential, and unstructured orientations, as well as concepts of God, Higher Power, and spiritual source. (p. 253)

Defining Spiritual Coping

Spiritual coping is “the use of spiritual beliefs or behaviours to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances” (Koenig et al., 1998, p. 513). *Positive* (effective) *spiritual coping* methods are “an expression of a sense of spirituality, a secure relationship with God, a belief that there is meaning to be found in life, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others,” whereas, *negative* (ineffective) *spiritual coping* are “an expression of a less secure relationship with God, a tenuous and ominous view of the world, and a religious struggle in the search for significance” (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998; p. 712).

Defining Feminist Perspective

Very simply stated, the feminist perspective views individuals as the experts of the meaning of their own lives (Brooks-Harris, 2008), and suggests that it is “important to stay close to clients’ phenomenological experience” (Brown, 1994, p. 115).

Thesis Overview

The current literature is examined in Chapter Two, commencing with a feminist perspective that situates this research. A review of the CSA research, including the definition used in the present study, prevalence rates, and sequelae (long-term effects) follow. This chapter closes with a discussion of resiliency and coping, particularly spiritual coping.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used for the present study, specifically Giorgi’s empirical phenomenology. Research participant sampling and recruitment, data generation, data analysis, evaluation criteria, and ethical considerations will also be discussed.

The research findings are presented in Chapter Four followed with a discussion of the results, including suggestions for further research, and implications for counselling practice in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to situate the present study, a feminist perspective and a review of current and relevant literature are presented. A definition and prevalence of CSA has been provided, as well as the sequelae (long-term effects) of CSA. Additionally, an examination of the literature regarding interpersonal/psychosocial affects of CSA, gender differences in relation to CSA, and the diverse effects of CSA are addressed. Coping, resiliency, and the current state of research on spirituality and religion are also introduced. Finally, spiritual coping is described in addition to patterns of coping (both positive and negative) and the spiritual outcomes of CSA.

Feminist Perspective

The feminist and women's movements have been consistently credited with bringing the issue of CSA into public awareness (Finkelhor, 1984; Haaken & Lamb, 2000; Herman, 1997; MacLeod & Saraga, 1988). Feminist researchers and writers have examined the sexual objectification of children by men, as men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of CSA, despite the ability and means of all adults (men and women), and adolescents to abuse children (MacLeod & Saraga, 1988). Studies have found anywhere from 91-97% of CSA is committed by males, with the majority of sexual abuse occurring to girls (Sanderson, 2006). As most CSA is perpetrated by males against females, feminist scholars tend to view CSA as occurring "within a 'gendered' social context in which males have more power than females in our society" (Ullman & Filipas, 2005, p. 768). Finkelhor (2005) suggested that male supremacy is responsible for the prevalence of sexual victimization in society as it remains an effective way for the (male) *dominant status group* to have power and control over women. Therefore, from the feminist perspective, blame is attributed to a patriarchal society and male socialization (Finkelhor, 2005; Herman & Hirschman, 2005; MacLeod & Saraga, 1988), and is viewed as "one part of the spectrum of male violence against women and children" (MacLeod & Saraga, 1988, p. 40).

Burke Draucker and Martsolf (2006) suggested that a feminist perspective "may help survivors put their childhood sexual abuse in a larger social context" (p. 103). According to Herman (2005) there are several reasons a feminist analysis is appropriate: it "remains the only one capable of explaining how such widespread abuses visited mainly by one sex upon the other could be so long denied or condoned," it explains why "perpetrators look like the ordinary men they are – indeed, why so many are men of power and respect;" why "women have always been the most committed advocates for abused children and adult survivors;" and why "such bitter

conflict arises any time a serious effort is made to hold incest perpetrators accountable for their crimes” (p. 40). Although the bulk of the research on CSA focuses on women survivors, the present study also examines women survivors, situated within a feminist framework as there is still much to learn about how women cope with the trauma of CSA (Houg, 2008).

Childhood Sexual Abuse

Defining Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Determining a universal definition of CSA is very difficult as it is socially constructed and varies with empirical issues such as societal norms and values (Webster, 2001), culture, historical time (Sanderson, 2006), local law, and social mores (Willows, 2009). Cultural determinants of abuse influence definitions of CSA and the age that constitutes a child (Webster, 2001), particularly the age of consent (Sanderson, 2006).

It is recommended that a comprehensive definition of CSA include coverage of the terms *child*, *sexual*, and *abuse* (Sanderson, 2006; Webster, 2001). Therefore, the working definition employed in the present study includes a definition of *child* as being under the age of 16, which is the most recent legal age of consent in Canada (LoVerso, 2008). The other two components *sexual* and *abuse*, are much more difficult to define. However, for the purposes of the present study, they were broad and inclusive, and incorporate a full range of acts in order to establish a more robust definition (Sanderson, 2006; Willows, 2009). Therefore, Sanderson’s (2006) definition of CSA was applied in the present study:

CSA is the involvement of dependent children and adolescents in sexual activities with an adult or any person older or bigger, where there is a difference in age, size or power, in which the child is used as a sexual object for the gratification of the older person’s needs, or desires, and to which the child is unable to give informed consent due to the imbalance of power or any mental or physical disability. This definition excludes consensual sexual activity between peers. (p. 25)

The above definition incorporates an array of sexually abusive acts, including physical and non-physical contact, ranging from: grooming, sexually suggestive language and gestures, voyeurism, exhibitionism, exposure to or use of child for pornography or prostitution, fondling, masturbation, oral-genital contact, and digital and penile penetration (Putnam, 2003; Sanderson, 2006).

Sanderson (2006) listed family members who may be responsible for perpetrating the abuse to include: “fathers, mothers, stepfathers, stepmothers, resident friends of the family, uncles, aunts, siblings, stepsiblings, grandparents, cousins and all other permutations of male and female relatives in the extended family” (p. 25). Non-family members who may be responsible for perpetrating sexual abuse include:

male and female adults, or older peers, who are in *loco parentis* and as such have authority and power over the child, such as babysitters, nursery workers, teachers, sports coaches, youth workers, community workers, carers, representatives of religious institutions, pastoral carers, and people who care for children in institutional, residential or foster care. Also included are other members in the community who may or may not be known to the child, such as neighbours. (Sanderson, 2006, p. 25)

The term *abuse* can be much more difficult to define because of the wide range in experiences and contexts (Willows, 2009). Survivors of CSA are not seen as a homogeneous group as the context in which CSA occurs, how it manifests, and is experienced varies significantly (Sanderson, 2006). For some, CSA occurs in the context of a “special loving relationship,” and is not seen as traumatic at the time (Sanderson, 2006, p. 37). For other survivors, their sexual abuse experience may have been traumatic at the time of the event or in retrospect upon discovery and realization of the abuse (Sanderson, 2006). Also, the context of abuse differs as some survivors experience a single incident of abuse, and others experience repetitive and multiple occurrences, lasting for years (Willows, 2009). In some cases, grooming by way of gifts and attention or emotional pressure may be used by the perpetrator, however, coercion, violence, and threats are also commonly used (Willows, 2009). Another important consideration is whether there were others who were aware of the abuse but did not prevent it (Willows, 2009). In addition, the personality, gender, and developmental age of the child, the age and gender of the perpetrator, the nature of the relationship between the child and the perpetrator, and the context in which the CSA occurred (number, frequency, and duration of the abuse experiences) may impact the effects and outcomes for survivors of CSA (Putnam, 2003; Sanderson, 2006; Willows, 2009).

Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse

The Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS) was the first national study of the incidence of child abuse and neglect reported to and investigated by child welfare authorities in Canada. To date, the CIS have conducted three studies, the first in 1998,

the second in 2003, and the last in 2008 (PHAC, 2010). In 2008, there were an estimated 235,842 child-maltreatment-related investigations in Canada, with 36% of those cases that were substantiated, and another eight percent of investigations that had insufficient evidence to substantiate the investigations (PHAC, 2010). According to the CIS, “sexual abuse was identified as the primary maltreatment category in 3% of substantiated investigations (an estimated 2,607 investigations or 0.43 investigations per 1,000 children)” (PHAC, 2010, p. 3). Although studies exist that examine child sexual abuse and exploitation, it is difficult, even impossible, to determine accurate numbers of Canadian children who experience CSA due to the vast majority of CSA that is believed to be underreported (Bagley & King, 1990; Mathews, 1996; Peters, Wyatt & Finkelhor, 1986). Conservative estimates indicate that as little as ten percent of CSA is actually reported to the authorities (Sanderson, 2006). Researchers believe that underreporting is a result of the stigma attached to CSA (Pilgrim, 2006), shrouding CSA “in secrecy and silence” (McClure, Chavez, Agars, Peacock, & Matosian, 2008, p. 81).

In addition to perceived underreporting which may affect prevalence rates, meaningful prevalence rates are challenging to obtain based on the difficulty in determining a universal definition of CSA, and research data produce a range in statistics depending on the study’s operational definition (Briere & Elliott, 2003; Burke Drauker & Martsof, 2006; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Sanderson, 2006; Webster, 2001; Willows, 2009). It is generally accepted that CSA occurs more frequently than previously believed (Burke Drauker & Martsof, 2006; Willows, 2009). Factors or abuse-specific variables that affect and influence the range of prevalence rates in the literature (Sanderson, 2006; Peters, Wyatt, & Finkelhor, 1986) include: the age of consent, acts and types of relationships used to define CSA (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1990; Willows, 2009), as well as true differences in prevalence (among certain populations), and methodological variations (i.e., participant recruitment, interview style and questioning, sample representativeness, and reporting methods) (Briere & Elliott, 2003; Burke Drauker & Martsof, 2006; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Peters et al., 1986; Putnam, 2003). The narrower the definition of CSA used (such as limiting the definition to include only penetration), the lower the incidents rates tend to be, and the broader the definition (including for example, exposure to pornography), the higher the incidence rates are likely to be (Sanderson, 2006). The result is drastic discrepancies in incidence rates reported in the North American literature.

Despite these challenges and barriers to obtaining accurate prevalence rates of CSA, in 1986, Peters et al. reported rates as low as 6% of women and 3% of men having experienced CSA to as high as 62% and 31% of women and men, respectively. Although these statistics appear to be outdated, Casey and Nurius (2006) found that compared with research conducted over the last 20 years, current prevalence rates of child sexual abuse were found to be consistent and unchanged. The World Health Organization suggests that approximately one in every three children in the world is a victim of CSA (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Regardless of the large variation in prevalence rates, even the lowest reported incidences indicate that CSA is a serious issue, more common and widespread than people realize, whereas the higher rates illuminate an issue of epidemic proportions (Sanderson, 2006; Willows, 2009).

Long-Term Effects (Sequelae) of Child Sexual Abuse

CSA has been shown by a plethora of studies to have severe and profound impacts on individual psychological (Beitchman et al., 1992; Briere & Elliott, 2003; Bulik, Prescott, & Kendler, 2001; Jumper, 1995; Katerndahl, Burge, & Kellogg, 2005; Neumann, Houskamp, Pollock, & Briere, 1996; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Seng, Low, Sparbel, & Killion, 2004; Willows, 2009), psychiatric (Bulik et al., 2001; Dinwiddie et al., 2000; Katerndahl et al., 2005; Kendler et al., 2000; Molnar, Buka, & Kessler, 2001; Neumann et al., 1996; Putnam, 2003), physiological (Beitchman et al., 1992; Leserman, 2005; Putnam, 2003), psychosocial (Beitchman et al., 1992; Neumann et al., 1996; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Roberts, Reardon, & Rosenfeld, 1999), physical (Beitchman et al., 1992; Leserman, 2005; Roberts et al., 1999), and behavioural (Beitchman et al., 1992; Neumann et al., 1996; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Putnam, 2003; Roberts et al., 1999; Seng, et al., 2004) adjustment. Extensive reviews and meta-analyses of the research evidence, which span more than twenty years has associated a history of CSA with such deleterious sequelae as: depression (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Dinwiddie et al., 2000; Jumper, 1995; Margolin, 1999; Neumann et al., 1996; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Putnam, 2003; Roberts et al., 1999; Schetky, 1990; Willows, 2009), anxiety (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Jumper, 1995; Margolin, 1999; Neumann et al., 1996; Putnam, 2003; Roberts et al., 1999; Schetky, 1990; Willows, 2009), substance abuse disorders (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Dinwiddie et al., 2000; Jumper, 1995; Neumann et al., 1996; Putnam, 2003; Roberts et al., 1999; Schetky, 1990; Seng et al., 2004; Willows, 2009), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Neumann et al., 1996; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Putnam, 2003;

Schetky, 1990; Willows, 2009), personality disorders (i.e., borderline, dependent, antisocial) (Putnam, 2003; Schetky, 1990; Willows, 2009), somatization disorder (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Neumann et al., 1996; Putnam, 2003; Seng et al., 2004), dissociative (identity) disorders (Putnam, 2003; Schetky, 1990; Willows, 2009), dissociation (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Neumann et al., 1996; Seng et al., 2004), eating disorders (i.e. bulimia nervosa, anorexia) (Putnam, 2003; Roberts et al., 1999; Seng et al., 2004; Willows, 2009), revictimization (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Jumper, 1995; Margolin, 1999; Neumann et al., 1996; Schetky, 1990; Seng et al., 2004), suicide (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Neumann et al., 1996; Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Willows, 2009), interpersonal/social problems (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Neumann et al., 1996; Roberts et al., 1999; Schetky, 1990; Seng et al., 2004; Willows, 2009), sexual problems (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Margolin, 1999; Neumann et al., 1996; Roberts et al., 1999), impaired self-concept (i.e., poor self-esteem) (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Jumper, 1995; Neumann et al., 1996; Roberts et al., 1999), self-abusive behaviour (i.e., suicide attempts, self-mutilation) (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Dinwiddie et al., 2000; Jumper, 1995; Margolin, 1999; Neumann et al., 1996; Roberts et al., 1999; Schetky, 1990; Seng et al., 2004; Willows, 2009), anger/hostility (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Neumann et al., 1996), obsessions and compulsions (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Neumann et al., 1996; Willows, 2009), academic and learning difficulties (Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001; Schetky, 1990), sexual promiscuity, victim-perpetrator cycle (Oddone Paolucci et al., 2001), conduct disorder, panic disorder, social phobia (Dinwiddie et al., 2000), isolation and stigma (Jumper, 1995), guilt (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Roberts et al., 1999), conversion reactions, sleep disturbance, self-blame, helplessness (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000), self-hatred, shame, and lack of trust (Roberts et al., 1999).

Although not an exhaustive list, it has been consistently and convincingly demonstrated that a history of CSA can have long-reaching and devastating effects for survivors. Willows (2009) reported that CSA histories can significantly increase “the risk of the occurrence of a wide variety of symptoms, conditions and disorders” (p. 87) and “psychological and developmental difficulties in childhood and, likewise, can increase the risk of mental health problems in adult life” (p. 25).

Pilgrim (2006) confirmed that there is evidence in reviews of the literature that survivors of CSA are at increased risk for mental distress compared with children who have not been

sexually abused. “Other studies have shown a higher proportion of survivors in the psychiatric population” (Walker, 2006, p. 465). Ainscough and Toon (1996) found that over 23 percent of men and 50 percent of women seeking psychiatric help were survivors of CSA. Katerndahl et al., (2005) found that “psychiatric morbidity in women with a history of CSA was common, often leading to multiple comorbidities” (p. 102). Despite risk factors associated with CSA, Molnar, Buka, and Kessler (2001) found evidence suggesting that when CSA was examined in isolation of other risk factors, it is still highly associated with psychopathology, demonstrating some disorder rates almost double the results for the entire sample.

Interpersonal/Psychosocial Affects of Child Sexual Abuse

Davis and Petretic-Jackson’s (2000) review of the literature established that CSA not only impacts (women) survivors, but it also impacts those in relationship to survivors. While the focus has been predominantly on behaviour that is viewed as problematic in the social realm such as violence and substance use, it is equally as important to consider “aspects of social functioning that involve the absence of positive social interactions (e.g., lack of trust, intimacy issues)” (p. 294). The authors note that these problems are recognized to be closely associated with “internalized symptomatic distress” such as depression, dissociation, and withdrawal for CSA survivors (p. 294).

Davis and Petretic-Jackson (2000) found that CSA also has implications for interpersonal functioning (involving issues of intimacy and sexuality), although the nature of the impact is unclear as there is considerable variability in functioning among survivors. It has been revealed that “a substantial number of survivors report some degree of difficulty in sustaining sound, stable, and satisfying relationships” (p. 295), although a number of survivors “are able to establish long-term, lasting, and healthy relationships with partners, while others display a pattern of many transient, casual relationships, even prostitution,” while still others avoid relationships altogether (p. 294). Although their review focused primarily on intimate partnerships, they suggest that other relationships pertinent to the survivor are likely to be impacted as well, including family and work relationships, and friendships.

Gender Differences

Several research studies have revealed gender differences in the relationship between the exposure to CSA and adjustment problems (Rind, Tromovitch, & Bauserman, 1998) as well as psychopathology (MacMillan, et al., 2001), with the association generally being stronger for

females than for males (MacMillan et al., 2001; Rind et al., 1998). Female survivors tend to report elevated levels of PTSD (Feiring, Taska, & Lewis, 2002; Sigmon, Greene, Rohan, & Nichols, 1996), trauma-related distress (Sigmon et al., 1996), psychiatric disorders (MacMillan et al., 2001), antisocial behaviours (MacMillan et al., 2001), depression (Feiring et al., 2002; MacMillan et al., 2001; Sigmon et al., 1996), anxiety (Sigmon et al., 1996), alcohol abuse/dependence (MacMillan et al., 2001), and illicit drug abuse/dependence (MacMillan et al., 2001), than males.

Gender differences in response to CSA and to coping strategies have also been noted in the literature (Hunter, 2006; Little & Hamby, 1999). Research has shown men typically cope by remaining silent or concealing the abuse (Dorais, 2002) as well as using strategies of acceptance (Hunter, 2006), whereas women are more likely to use more emotion-focused strategies (Sigmon et al., 1996). These emotion-focused strategies include “the use of distancing, self-blaming, focusing on the positive, wishful thinking and less seeking of support in response to memories of the abuse than a non-abused group” (Gall, 2006, p. 830).

In their survey, Little and Hamby (1999) found differences between female survivor-therapists and male survivor-therapists “in terms of their perceptions of abuse impact and the saliency of their recovery experiences” (p. 384). The study included 131 therapists with histories of CSA who responded to questionnaires. Although the researchers did not reveal any gender differences “in the severity of the abuse experienced or in the frequency of other family problems,” they did find several differences in outcome domains. For instance, women were reported to have a greater negative impact resulting from the abuse than did men in the following areas: “body image, healthy eating habits, self-esteem and a sense of worthiness, ability to trust others, relationship with significant others, work, and ability to cope with stress adequately” (p. 381). A possible explanation the authors give for these differences is the potential reluctance of male clinicians to disclose the full extent of the impact of their experiences due to social stigma and denial. However, Little and Hamby (1999) found that there were few gender differences reported among relevant recovery experiences. They did not find a significant amount of difference between men and women in relation to how they endorsed six “working-through” processes (i.e., relinquishing guilt, renegotiating relationships, talking about the abuse, experiencing feelings of abuse, identifying and gaining control over self-destructive behaviours, and confronting perpetrator or those involved) (p. 382). There were only two specific activities:

“attending workshops and conferences on sexual abuse and being able to help others,” which saw a difference in endorsement rates between gender, with women more commonly endorsing these activities than men (p. 382).

Little and Hamby (1999) found that “although a similar percentage of men and women had experienced most methods of recovery, the impact of these experiences varied significantly for a number of items” (p. 383). They found that women rated the experiences of “talking about the abuse to others, relinquishing my guilt, and renegotiating my relationships with my family of origin” as well as “my personal therapy, reading about child sexual abuse, writing about what happened to me, and hospitalization” as significantly more important than men did (p. 383). Career resources such as “professional writing and community activism” were the only two variables found to be more important to men than women, and they were only found to be slightly more significant (p. 383). Both men and women rated personal therapy as “the single most helpful recovery experience” (p. 383). Finally, the authors found that “relational resources, such as having a loving relationship with a partner or having children, did not vary by gender” and therefore, might signify that some recovery experiences may be equally relevant for both genders (p. 384).

The impetus for Little and Hamby’s (1999) study was based on a lack of answers to such basic questions as “How do male and female survivors work on their healing?,” “What ways do they find are most important for their healing?,” and “What are the treatment implications of any gender differences?” (p. 378). These are important considerations for clinicians who find themselves with the dilemma of having no guidance to address gender differences in the affects of CSA on male versus female survivors. Hunter (2006) found that the results of Little and Hamby’s (1999) study “supports the idea that child sexual abuse has a more profound effect on women than on men” (p. 351).

As previously discussed, CSA occurs “within a ‘gendered’ social context,” and as such, Ullman and Filipas (2005) considered it to be critical to consider the role that gender plays when “examining correlates of post-abuse adjustment” (p. 768). Therefore, these authors conducted research that examined the issue of gender differences in relation to CSA. They used a convenience sample of 733 college students (71% female, and 29% male) in the “Psychology Department Subject Pool and through classroom announcements in Criminal Justice Department classes at an urban research university for over a year for a study on personal experiences in

childhood” (p. 771). Students completed a confidential survey about their “demographic characteristics, sexual abuse experiences, disclosure characteristics, post-abuse coping, and social reactions from others” (p. 767). They found that gender differences in CSA exist in several domains including: the prevalence and severity of CSA, the likelihood and nature of abuse disclosures, social reactions received from others, coping responses, and PTSD symptom severity. The authors concluded that the clinical implications of their findings suggest that “mental health professionals need to be aware that female students may respond more negatively to CSA by relying more on avoidance coping and self-blame, both of which relate to greater PTSD symptoms (p. 780).

Diverse Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

Despite the overwhelming evidence indicating that CSA has severe and lasting impacts on survivors and those around them, there have been several studies which indicate that CSA does not inevitably result in adverse or devastating impacts (Dallam et al., 2001; Haaken & Lamb, 2000; Oaksford & Frude, 2003; Oellerich, 2000; Rind et al., 1998), particularly when mediating variables are not controlled for (Horwitz, Widom, McLaughlin & White, 2001). For example, it has been suggested that other variables might account for the correlation between CSA and maladjustment (Rind et al., 1998). These variables include:

the younger the child when abused, the closer the relationship of the abuser to the child, the significance of that person as an attachment figure, abuse that is repeated over many years, the involvement of others in the abuse (i.e., an abuse ring), and the absence of other supportive or loving figures. (Walker, 2006, p. 465)

Several studies found that survivors may in fact remain asymptomatic (Beitchman et al., 1992; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Putnam, 2003; Rind et al., 1998).

A highly controversial meta-analysis conducted by Rind et al. (1998) concluded upon reviewing 59 studies, using college samples, that negative effects of CSA “were neither pervasive nor typically intense, and that men reacted much less negatively than women” (p. 22). In response to Rind et al.’s (1998) article, additional studies have surfaced in order to dispute their findings. Ondersma et al. (2001) tendered that the controversial results of the Rind et al. (1998) and other similar studies (i.e. Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993; Fromuth, 1986) have caused a shift in focus regarding CSA research from “the lack of inherent harm in CSA because some

children are not affected” to an understanding of “the resiliency among children who are not negatively affected” (p. 708).

At the risk of minimizing the negative effects experienced by many survivors, the important message from the aforementioned studies is that variability exists in the impact of CSA on survivors, potentially offering “a message of hope to many families” (Hunter, 2006, p. 351). Although survivors as a group, tend to develop patterns of problems, and they appear to have more psychological sequelae, these research results suggest that, “there is no single universal or uniform impact of sexual abuse, and no certainty that any given person will develop any posttraumatic responses to sexual abuse (for example, sexual concerns and dissociation)” (Briere & Elliott, 1994, p. 63).

Coping and Resiliency

Although resiliency is a promising new direction in the research literature, the current literature extensively documents the impact of CSA on survivors with a dearth of research regarding positive coping and resiliency; processes and factors that may protect survivors from future psychosocial difficulties (Hunter, 2006; Swanston et al., 2003). The simplified definition of coping offered by Lazarus (1993) is that coping “consists of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage psychological stress” (p. 237). The terms *coping* and *resiliency* are often used interchangeably. However, Valentine and Feinauer (1993) defined resiliency as “the power or ability to...overcome adversity, survive stress and rise above disadvantage” (p. 222). Building upon this and resulting in a more comprehensive concept of resiliency, researchers (Ungar, 2005; Peters, 2005; Seccombe, 2002) have proposed that resiliency is more than merely the ability of individuals to cope with adversity, it is also “the capacity of the person’s community to provide the health resources necessary to nurture and sustain well-being, providing individuals opportunities to access health resources in culturally relevant ways” (Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Cheung, & Levine, 2008, p. 2). Ungar (2008) proposed that resiliency can also be understood as coping strategies.

It has recently been suggested that research on the adjustment of CSA survivors be broadened to include different ways of understanding coping mechanisms (Banyard, 2003), as well as the processes that promote resilience (McClure et al., 2008; Rutter, 1993). The literature indicates that survivors of CSA often develop defences or coping mechanisms to cope with the trauma they have experienced (Herman, 1997). The experiences of CSA survivors vary

considerably, as do the coping behaviours they use to survive their trauma. Some coping strategies are viewed as *healthy* or *adaptive* and others as *maladaptive* or even problematic (Willows, 2009) as they “may lead to negative effects in the long-term” (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2001, p. 297). Such coping behaviours may be attempts “to diminish thoughts and memories of the abuse” and include: “dissociation, self-mutilation, substance abuse, casual sexual relationships, and avoidance of intimate relationships” (Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2001, p. 297). Some authors recommend that these should be considered as adaptive responses to maladaptive life events rather than as unhealthy, dysfunctional and even pathological responses (Levenkron & Levenkron, 2007; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; van der Kolk, 1987). Bogar and Hulse-Killacky (2006) discovered that the women survivors of CSA they interviewed used a range of healthy or positive coping strategies including: “writing, self-talk such as prayer or palliatives, symbolism, overcompensating, avoiding the perpetrator, keeping busy, depersonalization and memory loss, healthy distrust, and setting limits and boundaries” (p. 322). Coping mechanisms have also been referred to as *survival strategies* as they facilitate pain survival, and help control thoughts and feelings of the abuse (Health Canada, 2004).

The variability in coping strategies may also explain the variability in outcomes for survivors (Oaksford & Frude, 2003). Oaksford and Frude (2003) identified long-term coping strategies which were used months and years after the abuse, to include: psychological escapes (i.e., concealing memories of abuse, wishful thinking, reliance on substances, and denial); support seeking (i.e., social and religious support); action-oriented strategies (i.e., avoiding the abuser and vulnerable situations); cognitive appraisal (i.e., downward comparison, minimization, acknowledging the abuser’s responsibility, cognitive rumination, emotional suppression, refusal to dwell on the experience, reassuming psychological control, and normalizing the experience); and, positive reframing (i.e., strengthening of personality, feelings of self-protection, improved empathy towards others, strengthened relationships and protection of own children from abuse). They determined that survivors used a wide range of coping efforts, with some survivors using many strategies, and others adopting only a few. They also found that coping is an unstable and changing process with certain mechanisms used only initially, others used only in the long-term, and other strategies consistently selected over time. This is congruent with the research conducted by Lazarus (1993), which has conceived coping as a process.

In their study, O'Dougherty Wright, Crawford, and Sebastian (2007) identified two general categories of coping strategies used by CSA survivors:

1) emotion-focused coping efforts that attempt to regulate one's emotions in dealing with the stressor (i.e., distancing, avoidance, controlling one's feelings, and self-blame), and 2) problem-focused efforts that attempt to manage the stressful situation (i.e., active problem solving, seeking social support, and confrontation). (p. 598)

Spiritual coping is "the use of spiritual beliefs or behaviours to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances" (Koenig et al., 1998, p. 513). Therefore, spiritual coping has been conceived as an emotion-focused coping strategy (Pargament, 1997; Thuné-Boyle, Stygall, Keshtgar, & Newman, 2006), but may also have elements of "cognitive (e.g. appraising illness as part of God's plan) and also behavioural (e.g. praying or attending religious services) components" (Thuné-Boyle et al., 2006, p. 152). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that emotion-focused coping is most useful in situations of extreme stress that are out of one's control. Therefore, emotion-focused coping is likely to be more prevalent among survivors of CSA (Brand & Alexander, 2003), especially women (Sigmon et al., 1996). Hence, spiritual coping strategies that have been found to be emotion-focused coping strategies may be particularly relevant for some survivors of CSA (Gall, 2006; Pargament, 1997).

Research has demonstrated several variables that may contribute to the resiliency of CSA survivors (Banyard & Williams, 2007; Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Gall et al., 2007; McClure et al., 2008; Oaksford & Frude, 2003; Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005). These include: family variables such as family cohesion and support, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery (McClure et al., 2008), social role satisfaction, and positive sense of community (Banyard & Williams, 2007).

In their phenomenological study with 10 women survivors of CSA, Bogar and Hulse-Killacky (2006) examined resiliency determinants and resiliency formation. Determinants and processes were each identified accordingly by "pivotal moments and the meaning participants attached to them...depending on the nature of the experiences and whether they were initiated by the participants themselves or by others" (p. 321). They identified resiliency determinants and categorized them in five clusters: (a) interpersonally skilled, (b) competent, (c) high self-regard, (d) spiritual, and (e) helpful life circumstances. For the purposes of the present research, the

‘spiritual’ cluster was the key resiliency determinant focused on. Bogar and Hulse-Killacky (2006) encountered most of their participants identifying “spirituality, religious convictions, or both as being important components of their resiliency” (p. 322). An additional four resiliency processes were also clustered: (a) coping strategies, (b) refocusing and moving on, (c) active healing, and (d) achieving closure. These determinants and processes were thought to interact and to change and evolve over time with other challenges and opportunities presented to survivors. The participants in this study felt that “resiliency was an ongoing and dynamic process that occurs throughout life” (p. 324).

Current State of Research on Spirituality/Religion

The current state of the research on spirituality and religion has sparked increasing interest in differentiating between the concepts of *religion* and *spirituality*. Although there is considerable overlap between the two, Miller and Thoresen (2003) identify that “there are problems with either equating or separating these constructs” (p. 29). The current debate is such that several authors have written on distinguishing between religion and spirituality (Hall, Catanzaro, Harrison, & Koenig, 2004a; Hall, Koenig, & Meador, 2004b; Hill et al., 2000; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

In her research which examined the role that spirituality plays in the recovery process of CSA survivors, Houg (2008) found that even survivors of CSA themselves make the distinction between religion and spirituality. The majority of her research participants distinguished between spirituality and religion, describing religion as a rigid, political institution, which is dogmatic and manmade with governing rules. In contrast, they defined spirituality as “personal, natural, and less rigid, with fewer boundaries....neither male nor female, but spirit” (p. 132). They also explained that religion may be a vehicle in expressing spirituality, but the two are not necessarily connected. Finally, they contrasted spirituality as being a decision or personal choice whereas religion is something that you are born into. Religion clearly has more negative connotations for these women and may possibly be a result of the feelings of betrayal that they experienced by their childhood religion and God who abandoned them.

Nonetheless, to date, “almost all empirical studies...have not recognized the distinctions” between religion and spirituality, “but instead have treated religiousness, religion, and spirituality as the same general concept” (Miller & Thoresen, 2003, p. 29). Research reports sometimes use

these terms interchangeably (Dervic, Grunebaum, Burke, Mann, & Oquendo, 2006, p. 973), with many characteristics common to religion being potentially common to spirituality, and vice versa (Hill et al., 2000). Although spirituality and religion have been previously used synonymously in research, for the purpose of the present study, the term spirituality will be used, with participants self-defining it.

Spirituality as a Resiliency Resource

Various research studies have noted that religion and spirituality have been proven to be integral factors for many people. According to The Canadian Press (2008), the most recent Harris-Decima survey found that 72% of respondents indicated that they believed in God, 23% indicated that they did not believe in God, and no opinion was offered by the remaining respondents. The poll also found differences in belief based on gender, with women being more likely to believe in God (76%) compared with men (67%). Additionally, the researchers found that Canadians over the age of 50 (82%), were more likely to believe in God than Canadians under the age of 25 (60%). They found English Canadians (73%) more readily to say that they believed in God than French Canadians (67%). Finally, a higher belief in God was found in rural Canadians (76%) compared with urban Canadians (69%). The majority of believers (77%) view God as a “spiritual force,” and/or as being present in all of nature (87%), and as believing in at least one spiritual (or supernatural) force (95%) (Ipsos-Reid Survey, 2003).

For many CSA survivors, spirituality or religion (as defined by participants) has been established to be a positive coping resource (Morrow & Smith, 1995; Krejci et al., 2004), as well as a factor in resilience and healing (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Gall et al., 2007; Knapik et al., 2008; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Oaksford & Frude, 2003; Shaw et al., 2005; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993) associated with mental and physical health. Gall et al. (2007) provided “support for the role of spirituality in the current adjustment of adult survivors of CSA” (p. 111). They found that the more importance survivors placed on “spirituality in their lives, the less they experienced depressive mood and the more they reported experiencing personal growth and a sense of resolution of their history of abuse” (p. 111). Other literature has presented similar results with spirituality proven to protect survivors from the development of various psychological problems (Gall, 2006; Chandy, Blum, & Resnick, 1996) such as the development of depression, shame, and interpersonal difficulties (Valentine, & Feinauer, 1993). Gall et al. (2007) purported that “a personal sense of relationship with God or a higher power may serve as

a significant protective factor for CSA survivors” (p. 112). Glaister and Abel (2001) also found that “relationships with God, church, religion, angels and nature” supported women in their healing of CSA. “Having a strong spiritual connection creates for survivors the possibility of being supported and guided in their struggles, obtaining new insights that aid in their recovery, and acquiring strength as a result of passing spiritual challenges” (Knapik et al., 2008, p. 346).

Valentine and Feinauer (1993) interviewed 22 Caucasian women from the state of Utah who had been sexually abused in childhood in order to determine resiliency variables that helped them to overcome their early experiences of CSA. They found that spirituality provided a support network and helped them make sense and meaning of their experiences in a fashion that “served to free them of blame and guilt for the abuse” and “gave them the faith to hold onto life and find meaning and purpose in their lives” (p. 220). Some of the women described spirituality as facilitating self-worth, importance, and life purpose despite the abuse. Ultimately, they felt as though their faith would help them to overcome their experiences of abuse.

Houg (2008) determined that “spirituality appears to alter the negative cognitions resulting from childhood sexual abuse” (p. 150), and has been shown to help the women in her study to set boundaries and forgive family members. Additionally, spirituality was found to offer hope in the area of forgiveness as this issue was found to be common to a majority (11 out of 14) of the women in this study. The women described their “single greatest spiritual struggle” as their ability to forgive the perpetrator. They expressed the process of forgiveness as being cleansing; a way for them to ‘let go’, which was necessary for their own healing. Furthermore, some of the women had relationships with individuals who acted as spiritual mentors or role models. These individuals may provide hope to survivors that they might be part of positive relationships, and through role modelling healthy spirituality, they may also act as a safeguard against spiritual damage.

Similarly, in their review of the literature on religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth, Shaw et al. (2005) made significant conclusions: first, “that religion and spirituality are usually, although not always, beneficial to people in dealing with the aftermath of trauma,” second, “that traumatic experiences can lead to a deepening of religion or spirituality,” and third, “that positive religious coping, religious openness, readiness to face existential questions, religious participation, and intrinsic religiousness [deep faith and personal relationship with God] are typically associated with posttraumatic growth” (p. 1). Linley and Joseph (2004) proposed

additional labels for posttraumatic growth including: “stress-related growth, perceived benefits, thriving, blessings, positive by-products, positive adjustment, and positive adaptation” and define posttraumatic growth as “positive changes following adversity” (p. 11).

Evidence also suggests that “spirituality remains an important part of trauma *recovery* for many survivors” (Fallot & Heckman, 2005, p. 215). These authors wrote: “even in study samples that report negative relationships between trauma and spirituality, respondents often simultaneously note the importance and value of spirituality in their lives and in their recovery process” (p. 216). The research by Houg (2008) also revealed that spirituality played a significant role in the recovery process of CSA survivors, by “increasing their self-esteem, promoting healthy relationships, creating meaning out of confusion, and allowing forgiveness toward self and others” (p. 148). Recent research conducted by Knapik et al. (2008) confirmed these findings that trauma recovery is typically enhanced by religion and spirituality. Results of other studies have also found spirituality to be associated with survivors’ healing of CSA (Oaksford & Frude, 2003; Valentine & Feinhauer, 1993). Based on the aforementioned research findings, Pargament, Koenig, & Perez (2000) recommended that “religiousness and spirituality represent potentially valuable resources for individuals in counselling” (p. 520).

Spiritual Coping

Spiritual and religious coping have been examined in the general areas of health (Gall et al., 2007; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Narayanasamy, 2004; Seybold & Hill, 2001; Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002; Thuné-Boyle et al., 2006) and studies have recently started to examine how religious and/or spiritual coping impacts adjustment (Belavich, & Pargament, 2002) to significant life events including illness (Gall, 2000; Narayanasamy, 2004; Thuné-Boyle et al., 2006), mental and physical health (Seybold & Hill, 2001), living with HIV/AIDS (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002), psychological functioning, and adjustment to stressful events (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Bjorck & Thurman, 2007), mental health and substance use disorders (Fallot & Heckman, 2005), sobriety (Hazel & Mohatt, 2001), suicidal behaviour in depressed adults reporting childhood abuse (Dervic et al., 2006), sexual assault (Frazier, Tashiro, Berman, Steger, & Long, 2004), death of a child (McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993), and terrorist events such as the Oklahoma City bombing (Pargament, Smith, & Koenig, 1996). It has been suggested that spiritual coping is “most useful in situations of extreme stress that are out of one’s control” (Gall, 2006, p. 831), such as the experience of CSA. With the exception of Nkongho’s (2008) recent

phenomenological study on *Religious Coping Among Sexually Abused Adolescent Girls* as well as Houg's (2008) qualitative study on *The Role of Spirituality in the Ongoing Recovery Process of Female Sexual Abuse Survivors*, very few empirical studies have specifically investigated the role of spirituality and personal functioning in relation to CSA (Gall, 2006; Gall et al., 2007). Although religious coping has been defined in the literature, spiritual coping has not. Given the present study's focus on *spiritual coping*, Koenig et al.'s (1998), definition of religious coping was adapted by replacing *religious* with *spiritual*. Consequently, *spiritual coping* was understood as "the use of spiritual beliefs or behaviours to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances" (p. 513).

Patterns of Spiritual Coping (Positive and Negative)

While *coping* is typically viewed as having a positive connotation, Pargament et al. (2000) caution: "coping can be ineffective as well as effective" (p. 524). In her quantitative study on *Spirituality and Coping with Life Stress Among Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, Gall (2006) found that "spiritual coping behaviour may play a negative as well as a positive role in survivors' response to current life stress" (p. 841). Gall's study also informed that spiritual coping may manifest positively or negatively depending on the context and circumstances of the abuse experienced by survivors as well as whether or not they have achieved a sense of personal resolution regarding their CSA. Given the varying outcomes of spiritual coping, it is important to examine both the positive dimensions of spiritual coping as well as the negative or potentially dysfunctional forms of spiritual coping.

Positive spiritual coping. According to Gall (2006), positive forms of spiritual coping reveal "a greater sense of attachment and reliance on a higher power for comfort and security and a concomitant active seeking of support from this higher power under times of stress" (p. 831). In Pargament, Smith, et al.'s (1998) factor analyses of the Patterns of Positive and Negative Religious Coping With Major Life Stressors, they assumed that the pattern of positive spiritual coping methods were an expression of "a sense of spirituality, a secure relationship with God, a belief that there is meaning to be found in life, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others" (p. 712). From this pattern, they delineated several forms of spiritual coping: "seeking spiritual support, religious forgiveness, collaborative religious coping, spiritual connection, religious purification, benevolent religious reappraisal and religious focus" (p. 720). They also discovered that patterns of positive spiritual coping were associated with "benevolent outcomes,

including fewer symptoms of psychological distress, reports of psychological and spiritual growth as a result of the stressor, and interviewer ratings of greater cooperativeness” (p. 721). As such, better outcomes for survivors are related to positive spiritual coping (Pargament et al., 2000). A synthesis of findings from nine studies (including Pargament et al., 2000) suggested that positive spiritual coping is correlated with: decreased psychological distress (Pargament et al., 2001; Thompson & Vardaman, 1997), decreased levels of depression (Bjorck & Thurman, 2007; Gall et al., 2007; Koenig et al., 1998; Pargament et al., 2000), decreased anxiety (Pargament et al., 2000), decreased mental health symptoms (Fallot & Heckman, 2005), better mental health (Koenig et al., 1998), greater stress-related growth (Koenig et al., 1998; Pargament et al., 2001), greater cooperativeness (Koenig et al., 1998), greater personal growth (Gall et al., 2007), greater spiritual growth (Koenig et al., 1998; Smith, Pargament, Brant & Oliver, 2000), religious outcome (Bush et al., 1999), increased self-esteem and sense of meaning (Houg, 2008), increased life satisfaction and quality of life (Bjorck & Thurman, 2007; Fitchett, Rybarczyk, DeMarco, & Nicholas, 1999; Koenig et al., 1998), more positive affect (Bush et al., 1999), healthier relationships including forgiveness towards self and others (Houg, 2008), abuse resolution (Gall et al., 2007), increased well-being, and less hostility (Thompson & Vardaman, 1997).

In their meta-analysis on *Religious Coping and Psychological Adjustment to Stress*, Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) found spiritual coping strategies to be “significantly associated with psychological adjustment to stress” (p. 473). They also found that a “positive relationship exists between positive religious coping strategies and positive outcomes to stressful events” (p. 473). In addition, they confirmed that “positive religious coping strategies are inversely related to negative psychological adjustment. That is, individuals who used positive religious coping strategies experienced less depression, anxiety, distress, etc.” (p. 474). Lastly, their findings corroborated previous research indicating that “negative religious coping strategies are positively associated with negative psychological adjustment to stress. That is, individuals who reported using negative forms of religious coping experienced more depression, anxiety, distress, etc.” (p. 474).

Negative spiritual coping. Contrarily to positive spiritual coping, Pargament, Smith, et al. (1998) assumed that the pattern of negative spiritual coping “is an expression of a less secure relationship with God, a tenuous and ominous view of the world, and a religious struggle in the

search for significance” (p. 712). They believed that the spiritual coping methods marking this pattern include: “spiritual discontent, punishing God reappraisals, interpersonal religious discontent, demonic reappraisal, and reappraisal of God’s powers” (p. 720). Gall (2006) supported their findings by suggesting that negative forms of spiritual coping invokes “a sense of personal discontent, anger and detachment in an individual’s relationship with a higher power” (p. 831). Intuitively then, there is a relationship between negative spiritual coping and poorer outcomes for survivors (Pargament et al., 2000), with adverse impacts such as: “depression, poorer quality of life, psychological symptoms, and callousness towards others” signalling potential emotional distress (Pargament, Smith, et al., 1998, p. 721). Negative spiritual coping and religious struggles have also been related to: increased depression (Bjorck & Thurman, 2007; Exline, Yali, & Lobel, 1999; Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000; Koenig et al., 1998; Pargament, Smith, et al., 1998; Pargament, Tarakeshwar, Ellison, & Wulff, 2001), increased anxiety (Exline et al., 1999; Pargament, Zinnbauer, et al., 1998), suicidality (Exline et al., 2000), increased psychological distress or symptoms (Pargament, Smith, et al., 1998; Pargament et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2000), increased post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (Fallot & Heckman, 2005; Pargament, Smith, et al., 1998), poorer mental health and increased distress (Fallot & Heckman, 2005; Thompson & Vardaman, 1997), poorer physical health (Koenig et al., 1998; Pargament et al., 2001; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001; Thompson & Vardaman, 1997), increased risk of mortality (Pargament et al., 2001), decreased satisfaction with life (Bjorck & Thurman, 2007), lower quality of life (Koenig et al., 1998; Pargament, Smith, et al., 1998; Pargament et al., 2001, p. 499), lower self-esteem (Pargament, Zinnbauer, et al., 1998), and greater callousness toward others (Pargament, Smith, et al., 1998; Pargament et al., 2001).

Although both positive and negative forms of spiritual coping occur, reviews have generally found spiritual coping to be typically more helpful than hindering (e.g., Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari, & Pargament, 2001; Thuné-Boyle et al., 2006). Fallot and Heckman (2005) corroborated this finding. They discovered in their research that examined the *Religious/Spiritual Coping Among Women Trauma Survivors With Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders*, that their 666 participants experienced much higher levels of positive spiritual coping than negative spiritual coping. This suggested that “women survivors experience spiritual

ways of dealing with stress more often as positive resources or supports than as struggles or conflicts” (p. 224).

Spiritual Outcomes

Research on sexual violence and trauma have generated both positive and negative spiritual outcomes for survivors (Gall et al., 2007; Davis & Petretic-Jackson, 2000; Kennedy, Davis, & Taylor, 1998; Knapik et al., 2008; Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005). However, limited research has looked specifically at the effects of CSA on spiritual development (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Houg, 2008; Nkongho, 2008; Reinert & Smith, 1997). The dearth of literature that exists relating to CSA and spirituality has resulted in inconclusive findings on the impact of CSA on survivors’ spirituality.

Houg (2008) observed almost all of her participants experienced transitions in their concept of spirituality. Most of the 14 women she interviewed had been raised in Christian or religious environments and claimed to have some sort of relationship with God early in their upbringing. However, following the abuse and into adolescence, they became angry and mistrusting of God, turning away from Him. “Although they professed a disbelief in God as adolescents, participants acknowledged that in reality, they were angry” (p. 131). As they continued to grow, almost every woman experienced a variety of changes encompassing a new concept of spirituality. Their new conceptions of spirituality became more flexible; seeing God as being more personal like a mentor, father, or friend, rather than being tied to religion.

Houg (2008) also discovered that anger, shame, and distrust were the biggest barriers to spiritual healing for her participants. Her participants concluded that there were “two possible explanations for God’s apparent lack of response: Either God did not exist and therefore could not intervene, or God did not care and therefore would not intervene” (p. 143). Their trust was shaken as they could not believe in a God that would allow such trauma to occur, resulting in feelings of abandonment. This obstacle of trust that Houg (2008) discovered is consistent with existing research regarding obstacles to the spiritual development of CSA survivors (Ganje-Fling et al., 2000). Survivors also seemed to transfer their mistrust for their perpetrator (all of the women in the study were sexually abused by men, specifically their biological fathers) onto God who is depicted as being male in most religious institutions. Many of the women also developed a general mistrust of the world and other people. These women blamed God for their abuse and

grew angry towards Him, using self-destructive behaviours to ‘get even’ with Him. Ironically, Houg (2008) described this behaviour as an oxymoron stating that:

in using their own destruction to get even with God, they were admitting their ultimate belief in His love for them. If God did not exist, if God did not care, then what difference would their self-destructive behaviour make to God? (p. 145)

As CSA is shrouded in secrecy and shame, it is natural that these women also experienced shame. They described this shame stemming from questioning “their own role in the abuse...simply because they were there and sexual acts were performed on them” (p. 145). They felt that the perpetrator must have targeted them for a purpose because there was something about them that was bad or disgusting. They discussed feelings of judgment from members of their congregation and were not able to reconcile these feelings until a separation was made between spirituality and the church, allowing the women to “return to God and face their shame” (p. 146).

In her recent (2008) phenomenological study, Nkongho interviewed 6 adolescent girls in an effort to learn more about the lived experience of adolescent girls who have experienced religious coping and sexual abuse. The description given by the participants implies that religious coping may be experienced as “a relational, intimate phenomenon” (p. 79). The lived experience of their religious coping was characterized by the young women’s definition of the sacred, an essential element. Nkongho found that this definition of the sacred changed with the experience of sexual abuse, providing a collective description of the adolescent’s experiences: “I created a new relationship, questioned an existing relationship, or strengthened the relationship I already had with the divine” (p. 69).

Positive spiritual outcomes. For many survivors, their experience with trauma may result in “profound spiritual changes as survivors come to attribute spiritual meaning to their violence and experience divine interventions that change the course of their lives” (Knapik et al., 2008, p. 346). This may enhance and deepen their spirituality. Research has found aspects of spirituality to be helpful for women who have experienced sexual violence including, religious support (Oaksford & Frude, 2003), church support and faith (Valentine & Feinauer, 1993), and belief in God’s protection (Smith & Kelly, 2001).

Some of the CSA survivors in Houg’s (2008) study gave “credit to God for saving their lives, either figuratively through preventing suicide or metaphorically through helping them

make healthier choices for themselves” (p. 148). They described God as turning their lives around and healing them from the effects of abuse while “guiding them through their lives and carrying them through difficult and dangerous times, even when they did not know of, or acknowledge His presence” (p. 148).

Other researchers have found that some survivors’ response to sexual violence is an increase in spirituality (e.g., Kennedy et al., 1998). For example, Kennedy et al. (1998) provided 70 women who had been sexually assaulted with questionnaires in order to examine “changes in the role of spirituality in their lives since the assault” (p. 322). They determined that sixty percent of the survivors “indicated an increased role for spirituality,” and the survivors with “increased spirituality appeared to have restored well-being, whereas those without increased spirituality continued to have significantly depressed well-being” (p. 322). In their study of 23 female survivors of sexual violence by male intimates, Burke Draucker, Noerager Stern, Wolbert Burgess, and Campbell (2000) provided a description of the experience of surviving sexual violence as being *spiritual* according to participants. They described many women in their study as having a belief that “God provided experiences of adversity so they could become stronger” (p. 397).

Negative spiritual outcomes. Research has established that CSA may negatively impact survivors’ spirituality (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Ganje-Fling et al., 2000; Knapik et al., 2008). The effects that CSA has on spirituality is often contextual, with the circumstances surrounding the abuse influencing survivors’ spirituality. For example, research on sexual abuse by clergy members indicates that “male and female survivors experience a distancing from their religious faith (Mart, 2004), spiritual distress (Fater & Mullaney, 2000), and decreased trust in clergy, church, and God (Fater & Mullaney, 2000; Rossetti, 1995)” (Knapik et al., 2008, p. 336). Research has also demonstrated that survivors of non-clergy sexual abuse are not impervious to negative spiritual effects (Knapik et al., 2008).

Murray-Swank and Pargament (2005) suggested that “despite the resource that spirituality can offer in the coping process, sexual abuse also creates a fertile environment for the development of spiritual struggles” (p. 192), including “difficulties in their religious identity, anger at God, feelings of abandonment by God, negative images of God, and spiritual isolation” (p. 201). It has also been found that CSA survivors are less involved in organized religion and experience less religiosity than individuals who have not had experiences of CSA (Murray-

Swank & Pargament, 2005). CSA survivors report a decrease in their spiritual well-being and perceive God more negatively than individuals who do not have a history of sexual abuse (Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005).

A study conducted by Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) reported that in their clinical experience, survivors encounter spiritual struggles and these difficulties relate to similar factors that affect their psychosocial functioning (i.e., age of abuse onset, number of perpetrators, relationship to the perpetrator, and abuse severity). These authors propose that spiritual development is arrested in the same manner as regular development following child sexual abuse, potentially causing survivors' spirituality to be underdeveloped. This development may be impeded by several obstacles such as mistrust, despair, anger, responsibility, forgiveness, and religious conflicts. The primary obstacle that they review, mistrust, occurs through the violation of safety by authority figures. CSA survivors learn to have mistrust and this mistrust may extend to God or a Higher Power who is viewed as an authority figure.

The second obstacle, despair, is the outcome of survivors feeling defeated and lacking "faith in the future" as well as meaning and purpose (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996, p. 254). Anger as a third obstacle appears if survivors are able to move beyond the despair that they experience. The anger manifests through questions such as "If there is a God, what kind of a God would let this happen?" (p. 254). However, these authors suggest that it is difficult for survivors to express anger if they have learned that expressing anger to a perpetrator puts them at increased risk and endangers them further. The fourth obstacle (responsibility and forgiveness) concerns the self-blame that survivors tend to feel and their sense of unworthiness to have a spiritual relationship. For example, the authors suggest that survivors "may blame themselves for not working hard enough on their spirituality, not being open enough to spiritual messages from a God or Higher Power, and so forth" (p. 254). The struggle of forgiveness results from the dilemma of forgiving the perpetrator, which some may feel is a "charitable relieving...of any responsibility for his or her actions," while still holding the perpetrator accountable for their actions (p. 254). A final obstacle that is discussed is religious conflicts. Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) state that many of their "sexually abused clients were raised in strict fundamentalist backgrounds, which they report experiencing as subtly or inherently abusive" (p. 254). The religious systems in which survivors were raised either ignored the abuse or enabled and even supported the abuse. For example, religious systems often teach children to submit to

adults in authority. In order to mend the conflict, reconciliation between current belief systems and religious messages that were taught and learned early on in life must occur.

Summary

CSA affects many women and has pervasive and negative impacts on the well-being of many survivors. In order to provide treatment for the deleterious effects of CSA and assist in the healing process, it is imperative to learn about and understand the factors that may facilitate coping and resiliency. Spirituality has been established as playing an integral role in some survivors' resiliency, and therefore merits consideration as a way of coping among survivors of CSA with religious and spiritual beliefs. However, spiritual coping is dynamic and complex and may manifest either positively or negatively. The patterns of spiritual coping have varying effects on the adjustment of CSA survivors and their spirituality. The importance of examining the wide range of patterns of spiritual coping is legitimized when examining the polar results that spiritual coping may have on survivors' adjustment; spirituality has the potential to either improve or exacerbate issues (Pargament, Tarakeshwar, et al., 2001) that arise as a result of the trauma of childhood sexual abuse. Additional research is required to further explore the lived experience of spiritual coping among women survivors of CSA.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Methodological Framework

This chapter presents an overview of qualitative research, my position as researcher, the methodological approach to the present research, as well as the elements of the method, including participant selection, data generation and analysis, quality criteria, and ethical considerations.

Qualitative Research

The purpose of the present study was to explore the lived experience and essence of spiritual coping among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). The nature of the research question informs and guides the research method (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2005). My research question was intended to explore survivor experiences. It has been expressed that the fundamental purpose or goal of qualitative research is to understand and describe the lived experience of people (Elliott et al., 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2005), as well as the meaning people make of these experiences (Creswell, 2008; Morrow, 2007; Morrow & Smith, 2000). It would follow that a qualitative approach was appropriate for the present study.

Qualitative research is characterized as being emic and idiographic: the former being the insider perspective of participants, and the latter meaning that it “produces knowledge claims about one or a very few individuals” (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p. 200). Morrow and Smith (2000) outlined the core assumptions and characteristics that ground qualitative research. These include: “1) studying individuals in the natural world; 2) learning about the meanings that people make of their experiences; 3) investigating individuals in social interaction and in context, and; 4) reporting the results of research in the everyday language of participants” (Morrow, 2007, p. 215).

Qualitative investigations are appropriate for highlighting and exposing new or unexpected knowledge about unfamiliar phenomenon in which little is understood (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Morrow, 2007). Morrow (2007) stated: “qualitative approaches are able to delve into complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted nature of the human phenomena” and “present a detailed and in-depth view of a phenomenon” (p. 211).

Haverkamp and Young (2007) suggested that one of the focuses of qualitative research is to identify a specific purpose for the investigation. They elucidated three categories of purposes

for qualitative research: 1) theory or construct-oriented research; 2) practice or evaluation-oriented research; and, 3) action or change-oriented research (p. 272). The present study fell under the practice-oriented purpose as it “pursues understanding to illuminate specific problems or improve specific practices,” “aims to inform practice by providing rich, elaborated descriptions of specific processes or concerns within a specified context,” and it has “the purpose of understanding particular counselling processes or client concerns from the perspective of persons who have not contributed previously to the understanding of such phenomena” (Haverkamp & Young, 2007, p. 274).

Another reason for my choice of a qualitative research approach was its congruence with the field of counselling psychology (Morrow, 2007), my discipline of study. Morrow (2007) added that “counselling psychology practitioners, in particular, may find qualitative inquiry more congruent with the narrative perspectives of their therapeutic work” (p. 211). Ponterotto (2005) suggested that this compatibility rises out of the growth of student interest in qualitative research and the natural congruence between “constructivist/constructionist philosophies and qualitative methods with the work of applied psychological practice” in addition to the relevancy of qualitative research approaches to multicultural psychology and the addition of qualitative research paradigms to the advancement of the field of psychology (p. 100).

Researcher paradigm. The researcher’s paradigm, “basic set of beliefs” (Guba, 1990, p. 17) or “worldview that guides the investigator” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105), influences the research from the beginning to the end of the research process (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Therefore, qualitative researchers are known to be forthcoming with their worldviews, assumptions, and biases so that the researcher’s position with respect to the research is apparent to the reader (Morrow, 2005; Morrow, 2007). Elliott et al. (1999) suggested that by being transparent through the “disclosure of values and assumptions helps readers to interpret the researcher’s data and understanding of them, and to consider possible alternatives” (p. 221). This has also aided in quality criteria.

Throughout the present research process, I have adhered to an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. The objective of the interpretivist-constructivist researcher is to understand the human experience (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2005); suggesting that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). Interpretivist-constructivist researchers examine individual experiences and subjective meanings and “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation

being studied” (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). Meanings of these experiences as well as the essences are co-created within this paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). Finally, a distinguishing characteristic of this paradigm is that “the researcher’s values cannot be divorced from the research process” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131) and subjectivity is inevitable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005).

Like the goals of qualitative research, the goals of an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm are also emic and idiographic (Ponterotto, 2005). This paradigm encompasses the researcher’s “assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), how they know what is known (epistemology), the inclusion of their values (axiology), the nature in which their research emerges (methodology), and their writing structures” (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 238).

Assumptions and biases. Through my experiences working with survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) and adult sexual assault (ASA), I have come to view people as the experts of their own lives. My education and training as a support worker at the University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre (SAC) helped me understand that when survivors opt to share their stories, they are selective of which pieces to share, and those who bear witness to their experiences and stories are privileged. Each person is unique, with their own set of experiences from which to draw upon; as such, construction of meaning and multiple realities exist. This lends itself to an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm.

Ontology. An interpretivist-constructivist paradigm follows a relativist ontology, meaning that multiple and equally valid realities exist (as opposed to a single, true reality), and these realities are co-constructed or co-created by participants and researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). Ontology is “one’s view of the nature of reality” (Morrow, 2007, p. 212) “and being” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127). My personal belief that people are the experts of their own lives is congruent with this ontology, as “there are as many realities as there are participants” (Morrow, 2007, p. 213).

Epistemology. Epistemology is the study and acquisition of knowledge (Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) and addresses the nature of “the relationship between the knower (research participant) and would-be knower (the researcher)” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127). Interpretivism-constructivism is grounded in a transactional and subjectivist epistemology, centralizing the co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participant in order to capture and describe participants’ lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005). Ponterotto (2005)

declared that reality “is subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual’s experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher” (p. 130).

Subjectivity. In the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, it is assumed and even embraced, that researcher values exist (Morrow, 2007) and influence the research process (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). It is also considered impossible to separate the researcher’s values and experiences from the research process (Haverkamp & Young, 2007), resulting in subjectivity being an integral part of the research process (Morrow, 2007). The role of the researcher is to examine and understand the influence that their experiences, values, beliefs, and assumptions have on the co-construction of meaning (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2005). This may be done through a process known as ‘epoché’ or setting aside, which is detailed later in this chapter. Involving the role of the researcher’s values in the research process (Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005) is known as axiology or “the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics, aesthetics, and religion” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 200). Axiology is also the place in which spirituality appears (Reason, 1993; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994).

Finally, methodology is driven by the research question, but determined by the researcher’s ontology, epistemology, and axiology, focusing “on the best means for acquiring knowledge about the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183). In other words, methodology is the process, procedures, and conceptualization of research (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005). As has been previously stated, the goal of interpretivism-constructivism is to understand the experiences from the perspective of those who have lived them (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). The present research necessitated a methodology which facilitated each participants’ reality to be accepted as uniquely her own. Phenomenology was deemed an appropriate methodology for the present study, with its purpose of examining the lived experience and essence of spirituality as a coping resource among adult women survivors of CSA.

Empirical (Descriptive) Phenomenology

Phenomenology is considered to be a facet of the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm (Morrow, 2007) and is a method that is frequently used by counselling psychology researchers (Creswell, 1998; Wertz, 2005). There are many branches of phenomenology depending on the philosophy that guides the phenomenological approach (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4). The specific

phenomenological approach that guided the present study was Giorgi's empirical (or descriptive) phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007), a viewpoint that is essentially Husserlian in nature (Giorgi, 2006; Hein & Austin, 2001).

It is widely accepted that phenomenology was founded in the early 1900s by German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2008; Langdridge, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007). Phenomenology is considered to be a philosophy as well as a qualitative research approach, with the goal of understanding lived experiences (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2008; Creswell et al., 2007; Langdridge, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007; Worthen, 2002), and with a focus on consciousness (Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi, 2005; Giorgi, 2006; Lavery, 2003). Giorgi (1997) claimed that one must be conscious of an experience in order to explore its meaning. Intentionality, consciousness, or "the public realm of experience" is the object of study in Husserl's phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007, p. 13). Intentionality is the correlation between what is experienced (the *noema*) and the way it is experienced (the *noesis*) (Langdridge, 2007). Empirical phenomenology is a method in which consciousness can be accessed and its components studied (Giorgi, 2006; Hein & Austin, 2001).

Husserl explained that the philosophical focus for phenomenological psychology is a "return to the things themselves" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4), with the goal of identifying the essence (essential "truths") of the phenomena under study as it appears (Byrne, 2001; Creswell, 2008; Hein & Austin, 2001; Langdridge, 2007). Husserl's philosophical assumptions of phenomenology involve lived experiences and the "move away from a subject-object dualism" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 85). Rather than referring to Platonic substances or word analyses, an essence "is the most invariant meaning for a context" (Giorgi, 1997, para. 20).

Empirical (descriptive) phenomenology is named as such because it begins with participants' concrete descriptions of their lived experiences, and "the end result is a second-order description of the psychological essence or structure of the phenomenon" by the researcher (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 251). Empirical phenomenology has two dominant characteristics. First, it emphasizes "the structure of the phenomenon of interest, that is, the commonality that is present in the many diverse appearances of a phenomenon" (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 8). Second, it focuses and relies on the language and words used by participants in order to communicate their experiences (Hein & Austin, 2001). Empirical phenomenology is said to be empirical as it relies on participants' accounts, and considers these accounts to be "factual data" (Hein &

Austin, 2001). In order to elicit rich descriptions of participant experiences, empirical phenomenology utilizes the methods of phenomenological reduction and descriptions of experiences as a means of illuminating “the lived world of the participant and also, possibly, the lived world of the researcher, along with others who have, or may in the future, experienced something similar” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 5).

The purpose of the present study was to examine the lived experience and essence of spiritual coping among women survivors of CSA. Survivors are all too often silenced regarding their sexual abuse as a result of “the context of denial and secrecy surrounding sexual abuse” (Morrow & Smith, 1995, p. 32), and phenomenology allows their voices to be heard (Morrow, 2007). This methodology evokes honour and respect for participants (Fletcher, 2004) as it seeks to retain the participant’s lived experience and allows for a deeper understanding of that experience.

Feminist Research Perspective

As outlined in the literature review chapter, the present research inquiry was influenced by feminist theory. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the congruency between feminist theory and phenomenology. In his commentary, Garko (1999) provides a compelling argument as to how “phenomenology is methodologically compatible with some important feminist values and principles underpinning feminist research” (p. 167). He outlines five areas in which a feminist approach to research is comparable and complementary to phenomenology.

The first line of comparison is the investigation and understanding of research participant’s lived experiences. Feminist researchers believe that it is paramount to have “a woman’s language, a language of experience. And this must come from our exploration of the personal, the everyday, and what we experience – women’s lived experiences” (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 146). With the goal of phenomenology to understand lived experience, it is therefore complementary to the feminist approach of researching women’s lived experiences.

A second line of comparison relates to a commitment to “openness, description, and understanding” inherent in both feminist research perspectives and phenomenology. Garko (1999) explained that women’s experiences were previously explored through positivistic methods, which has misinterpreted, “misconstrued or concealed” women’s lived experiences (p. 168). As such, a feminist research perspective supports a methodologically descriptive approach to exploring women’s lived experiences which, allows for an openness and for women’s voices to

be heard. These qualities are characteristic of descriptive phenomenology as the intent is to describe and understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have lived it. This method of exploration is therefore also open as phenomenologists do not have preconceived theories or interpretations, rather, they are devoted to being open to individual lived experiences and recognizing those experiences as the truth of a phenomena. Thus, descriptive phenomenology is congruent with a feminist approach to research.

A third line of comparison is that of “consciousness-raising” (Bartky, 1977, p. 23) which is crucial to feminism. Garko (1999) suggested that

the concept of consciousness is foundational to the feminist movement in that it is deeply implicated in feminist thinking about women’s experiences and lives, how women perceive and make sense of the world, and research methods unique to the study of women. (p. 169)

Phenomenology is therefore seen as being in alignment with a feminist research perspective as intentional consciousness is central to phenomenology, meaning that an experience must be conscious in order to be explored.

A fourth line of comparison is the parallel paradigm of feminist researchers and phenomenologists regarding the subject-object dualism. The feminist perspective according to Garko (1999) is that research is defined as a conversation between the researcher and the research participant. Rather than objectivity which, is assumed by positivistic research, the feminist framework is such that research should be subjective as there is reciprocity between the subject and object of research through mutual exchange and influence (Garko). Similarly, phenomenology also denounces objectivity, viewing the relationship between the subject and object of research as intrinsically linked and necessary in order for the truth and meaning of an experience to be revealed.

Lastly, the notion of suspending previous beliefs or assumptions is compatible with phenomenology and feminist research perspectives. This “bracketing” or setting aside is known in phenomenology as the “Phenomenological Reduction” or “Epoché” and will be discussed later in this chapter. From the feminist orientation, bracketing is necessary in order to allow the researcher to be able to more fully understand and describe participants’ lived experiences from the participant’s viewpoint, to “perceive women’s lived experiences with greater depth and breadth, and to see hidden sides and meanings of women’s lived experiences made obscure by

idiosyncratic and conventional ways of viewing the world” (Garko, 1999, p. 171). Garko explained:

feminist researchers believe that, if they are to challenge the taken-for-granted male-oriented values of society and transform societies’ institutions, themselves, and other women, they must suspend their own taken-for-granted beliefs and peresuppositions about the world as they attempt to explore and expose the meaning of women’s lived experiences. (p. 171)

Given Garko’s (1999) commentary on the lines of comparison between phenomenology and feminist approach to research, it is evident that although these two methodologies appear to be incongruent (at least initially), they are in fact complementary approaches to research. Thus, it was appropriate to apply a phenomenological methodology in relation to a feminist framework.

Research Participants

Purposeful sampling

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experience and essence of spirituality as a coping resource among women survivors of CSA. Therefore, my goal was to use purposive sampling (Creswell, 1998; Endacott & Botti, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Langdrige, 2007) as it is described as selecting “information-rich cases strategically and purposefully” (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Purposive sampling was chosen in order to study individuals who had experienced the phenomenon, who were willing to talk about and articulate these conscious experiences, and who were representative of those who have also experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

Recruitment criteria

The following criteria was used to select a purposive sample, ensuring that the information provided by participants was rich and full in description: English speaking adult women over the age of 18 years, who have experienced current or past counselling (which was important for current adjustment), sexual abuse prior to the age of 16, and spiritual coping in relation to their abuse. In phenomenological research, maximum variation is ideal among participants (Langdrige, 2007), so the goal was to find participants with similar experiences, but with as wide a range in differences as possible.

Participant Recruitment

Phenomenological studies typically recruit between two and ten participants (Creswell, 1998; Groenewald, 2004; Hein & Austin, 2001) which, is confirmed by Boyd (2001) to be sufficient to reach saturation, “that is when interviewees (subjects or informants) introduced no new perspectives on the topic” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 11). Although true saturation is not possible, Strauss (1987) explained that saturation is theoretically achieved when “all of the data that have been gathered and illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon of interest” (Morrow, 2007, p. 217). In addition, given the “vast amount of data that emerges from even one interview” (Hycner, 1985, p. 295) and “the time-consuming nature of the analytical process” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 58), a smaller sample size “is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam, 2002a, p. 28). This also allows for more time to be spent with each participant, illuminating participants’ experiences in-depth (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002).

Although the original goal was to recruit between three and five women for participation, given the nature and scope of the present study, it was manageable and reasonable to recruit three participants. A study of this size requires balancing the time, money, and expertise invested without compromising the depth of the descriptions desired (Nkongho, 2006).

Several service providing organizations that work with survivors of CSA were in support of my project and gave permission for participant recruitment within their agencies. According to Neuman (2006), these contacts are also known as *gatekeepers*, individuals who have the authority (either formally or informally) to control access to sites. Participant recruitment occurred through poster advertisement (Appendix A) at various agencies in a small Canadian city. The executive directors and managers of a variety of agencies within this city consented to hang posters in their agencies for participant recruitment. Having no immediate response from the posters, a new poster (Appendix B) was designed and hung a few weeks after the original poster.

Upon reading the posters, there were two potential participants who contacted me in order to determine whether they qualified for participation via a brief telephone interview (Appendix C). An initial interview was scheduled with both women in order to discuss informed consent, confidentiality, and the possible emotional consequences of participation. However, only one of the women followed through to the end of the research. Over the course of six months, the second participant had scheduled an initial interview on four separate occasions, but

either cancelled or failed to attend each time. After six months of failing to make contact, it was believed that the second woman was no longer interested, and no further contact was initiated. The other two participants became involved with the research as a result of a passive recruitment approach known as *social networking*, in which the target population was made aware of the study and perspective participants were allowed to approach the researcher (Lee et al., 1997). Both of these women followed the research through to completion.

Demographics

At the onset of the initial interview, basic demographic information (Appendix D) was collected from participants regarding their: age, relationship status, living situation, level of education, employment status, cultural background and spiritual/religious affiliation. The purpose of collecting such information was to help situate the participants within the research. A description of the research participants is given in order “to aid the reader in judging the range of persons and situations to which the findings might be relevant” (Elliott et al., 1999, p. 221).

Three women participated in the present study and completed both interviews. These women were between the ages of 45 and 48, two identified as being Caucasian, and one as Métis. Two of the women were married and one was in a same-sex relationship. Two of the women were employed full-time while one was retired, and two of the women completed undergraduate degrees while the other completed high school. Lastly, the spiritual or religious affiliations identified by the women were as follows: Aboriginal spirituality, Christian (Alliance), and an affinity for Buddhism with an interest in Aboriginal spirituality. All three women identified their biological fathers as being their abuser.

Data Generation

Prior to the discussion of data generation, it must be highlighted that experiential accounts or descriptions of lived experiences are never identical to the actual lived experience. Experiential accounts or descriptions of lived experiences are transformations of the actual lived experience regardless of the form they take (i.e., oral or written discourse, recollections, reflections, descriptions, taped interviews, or transcribed conversations) (van Manen, 1994). As a starting point to data collection, van Manen (1994) recommended reflecting on personal experience (Richards & Morse, 2007) as my own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that other’s are not. However, writing a personal description of a lived experience should be done in an experiential sense as much as possible rather than in an autobiographical

manner, knowing that one's own experiences are also possible experiences of others (van Manen, 1994). At the onset of the present research, I wrote a personal description of my own lived experience of childhood sexual abuse and spiritual coping. This account is found in chapter one of the present study.

Phenomenological Reduction or 'Epoché'

The nature of qualitative research is such that it is impossible to achieve true objectivity (Morrow, 2007). Van Manen (1994) cautioned that knowing too much (as opposed to too little) about the phenomena we wish to investigate may be a problem as the nature of phenomenology is that the topic of study chosen is the result of our direct experiences and interests. Therefore, through this pre-existing interest and knowledge, we also have "common sense," assumptions, presuppositions, and pre-understandings of the nature of the phenomena prior to coming to "grips with the significance of the phenomenological question" (van Manen, 1994, p. 46). Husserl believed that in order to successfully unveil essences, every effort should be made to bracket out individual biases, presuppositions, and other knowledge (Lavery, 2003).

In order to suspend these beliefs and judgment, the process of phenomenological reduction or 'epoché' must occur. Moustakas (1994) indicated that 'epoché' is the Greek meaning "to stay away from or abstain" (p. 85). The process of 'epoché' involves extensive self-reflection (Hein & Austin, 2001) and exploration of personal experiences, allowing the researcher to become aware of, make explicit, and set aside any previous knowledge, assumptions, and expectations in order to have the minimal influence on the research process as possible (Creswell et al., 2007; Giorgi, 2005; Merriam, 2002b; Moustakas, 1994). This will facilitate an understanding of, and allow the true essence or experience of the phenomenon to be explored without external influences (Giorgi, 2005; Worthen, 2002). An additional benefit to the phenomenological reduction is that by being open and explicit about one's biases and assumptions, it allows the reader to understand and be conscious of the researcher's perspective and influence on the research (Hein & Austin, 2001).

Epoché also reduces the possibility of leading research participants in the interview (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006). Hein and Austin (2001) recommended the researcher bracket their assumptions as a goal of "being as open and receptive as possible to participants' descriptions of their experiences of the phenomenon" (p. 6). Merriam (2002b) suggested: "with belief temporarily suspended, consciousness itself becomes heightened, allowing the researcher

to intuit or see the essence of the phenomenon” (p. 7). Individuals are the experts of their own experiences, and phenomenologists recognize that these experiences are unique to them and are treated as the truth (Giorgi, 2005). However, a commonality is assumed through human experience and phenomenologists use the process of bracketing to identify those commonalities (Giorgi, 2005).

In order to bracket my own knowledge and assumptions, I reflected in a journal throughout the research process including during the research design, data generation and analysis, and abstracting (Richards & Morse, 2007; Valle & King, 1978). This became a cyclical process; as new assumptions were revealed at a “level of reflective awareness,” leading to the discovery of additional assumptions, and so forth (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 6). This account appears within the Discussion Chapter in the form of a personal reflection. In addition, writing the literature review chapter of the present study also allowed me to identify and bracket any previous knowledge I had about the research topic as it illustrates the specific areas of research which was attended to (Berry, 2007; Giorgi, 1997).

Making explicit one’s positionality through the process of self-reflection is referred to as subjectivity in qualitative research (Morrow, 2007). Giorgi (2002) stated that in regards to phenomenology, “the goal is not to try to eliminate subjectivity, but rather to try to clarify the role of subjectivity when correct knowledge is attained” (p. 8). In fact, Husserl claims that subjectivity and world are “reciprocally related and cannot be separated” (Giorgi, 2002, p. 11). Morrow (2007) suggests that in order to “assure that researcher subjectivity does not dominate and that participants’ perspectives are fairly represented,” qualitative researchers can use the process of bracketing or self-reflective journals, member checks, and peer reviews (p. 216).

Interviews (description of an experience)

The second phase of phenomenology is to obtain a detailed description of experience from individuals who have lived it (Berry, 2007; Giorgi, 1997). The primary method of data collection in phenomenological research is the in-depth interview (Langdridge, 2007), which facilitates the “collection of naturalistic first-person accounts of experience” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 4) in an attempt to uncover the essence of the meaning of the experience (Worthen, 2002). Therefore, interviews were conducted with women who have had experiences of childhood sexual abuse and spiritual coping.

Kvale (1996) described the qualitative interview as being “literally an *inter view*, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest,” (p. 14) which facilitates learning and understanding from the participant’s perspective (Groenewald, 2004). The phenomenological style of interview is often unstructured and typically resembles an informal conversation, with an important difference being that it is more one-sided than an intimate conversation as “the researcher wants to gain information from the interviewee without also revealing his or her own perspectives:” the participant discloses while the interviewer listens attentively (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 147). Giorgi’s (1997) method of data generation includes open-ended interviews in order to allow participants sufficient opportunity to extensively express her viewpoint. This enables “a concrete, detailed description of the subject’s experience and actions, as faithful as possible to what happened as experienced by the subject” to be sought (Giorgi, 1997, para. 27). The goal would be to “elicit the maximum amount of information about the topic at hand” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 87).

The present research study has included conducting in-depth interviews, with open-ended questions, using purposive sampling, which sets out to purposely recruit only those people who share the experience being investigated (Langdridge, 2007; Neuman, 2006). Three adult women survivors of CSA who have reported that they have had experiences of spiritual coping were interviewed. Each participant was given the opportunity to choose a location for the interview that was convenient and comfortable for her and that was also appropriately private, safe, and conducive to tape recording as all interviews were audio taped with the written and informed consent of participants. The interviews were also transcribed verbatim by me, the researcher.

The Consent Form (Appendix E) was explained to and discussed with participants at the beginning of each interview. At my initial contact with each prospective participant, the woman had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss concerns regarding participation. However, she also had the opportunity to withdraw from participation at any point. The participants’ signature on the form signified an understanding of her rights, and was taken as consent to participate. Consent was revisited prior to each interview.

Following consent, the interview began and participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions (Interview Guide, Appendix F) (i.e., How have you experienced childhood sexual abuse? How have you experienced spirituality within your coping?) designed to guide the interview and elicit participants’ experiences without constraining their responses (Everall,

Truscott, & Paulson, 1999). During the interview process, an Interview Guide (Appendix F) with questions, follow-up probes, and introductory and concluding comments were used as a guide to ensure that the data gathered addressed all of the research questions (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006). Specifically, some of the necessary information from all participants included their experience of spiritual coping in relation to their experiences of CSA.

The purpose of this interview was to elicit descriptions of participants' experiences of spiritual coping through the use of descriptive questions as outlined in full in the interview guide (Appendix F). Derived from Nkongho's (2006) interview schedule from her research on religious coping among abused adolescent girls, the first question I posed was "How has the experience of childhood sexual abuse affected you?" The focus of this question was to draw out the participants' description of her experiences of CSA. The second question "What are some of the things you did to help you deal with that experience?" was designed to facilitate discussion around the concept of coping. By leaving it open-ended, the participant was able to generate a number of possible ways that she has attempted to cope with the CSA. As spirituality was not identified as a way of coping for the women at the time of the CSA, I then asked if she had experienced spiritual coping and what that experience was like for her (how her spirituality has made coping with the CSA easier, more difficult, or has had no effect).

The interview was flexible enough to allow for natural, spontaneous, and clarifying questions or probes to be asked in response to participant descriptions. Had participants chosen not to answer all the questions, I would have respected her wishes and looked for additional participants as a result of being unable to achieve the desired depth of information. However, this was not necessary as all participants responded freely to the questions. The data collection interviews and the number of participants recruited continued until the topic was exhausted or saturated, that is, "redundancy of findings that fulfil the research goals, is achieved" (Wertz, 2005, p. 171). Upon answering all questions and a complete description was given detailing the participants' experience, I asked if she had anything further she would like to add and then concluded the interview. Each participant was given a Referral handout (Appendix G) with a list of counselling services in the area in the event that the interview had caused any distress and she required support. I also indicated to her the time frame that she could expect for me to be in contact with her for the next stage of the process.

I completed two interviews with each participant that lasted one to two hours; an initial interview and a follow-up interview. Upon completion of the first interviews, I transcribed the interview data and each participant was given a copy of her own transcript prior to the second interview. The women were invited to read over their individual transcripts, and edit them by adding, deleting, or making the changes they saw fit. The opportunity to alter their information was given to ensure accuracy and integrity of the data (Creswell, 2003). A follow-up interview (Appendix H) was scheduled once a preliminary summary of themes had been made and an opportunity to review transcripts had transpired. At the second interview, following any desired changes made to their transcripts, participants were then asked to sign a Data/Transcript Release Form (Appendix I), giving consent for the transcripts or any portions thereof (including direct quotes) to be used in the research as well as future publications or presentations relating to the present research.

The goal of the second interview was to allow for a member check, facilitating participants in reflecting on their experiences and determining whether the essence of their experiences has been captured. This second interview acted as a validity check (Hycner, 1985) and allowed for as much interpretive insight as possible from participants (van Manen, 1994). I presented the participant with a hardcopy description of my preliminary data analysis based on the description of her experience from the first interview and transcript. I then gave her the opportunity to provide both written and verbal feedback in order to ensure accuracy of her description and experience. Once all revisions had been made and the participant had no additional information or corrections, the narrative description was considered to be an accurate reflection of the participant's experience of spiritual coping and was considered validated (Nkongho, 2006). The interview concluded with participants being given another Referral handout (Appendix G) and thanked for her participation. I also reminded each participant as to how she could access the results of the study. Following this, data analysis occurred, as detailed later in the chapter.

Research relationship. Qualitative research relies heavily on the relationship between researchers and participants. Thus, the quality of the relationship that is established between the researcher and participant is critical in order to develop trust and rapport as this demonstrates a commitment by both parties (co-construction of reality) to gain a better understanding of the experience being explored, and to allow greater access to the richness of the experiences of

participants (Ponterotto, 2005; Worthen, 2002). Establishing trust and rapport with participants can be a difficult and delicate dynamic because of the intimate nature of the relationship based on the sensitive and emotionally laden information that is disclosed. Therefore, it is essential that researchers take responsibility to be respectful and pay high regard to participants (Morrow, 2007).

Morrow (2007) suggested that “counselling psychologists are often well skilled in developing positive, respectful, and collaborative relationships because of our clinical training and experience” and that “values such as egalitarianism, cultural sensitivity, and respect guide the qualitative researcher in her or his relationship with research participants” (p. 218). Hence, these skills are essential to the research process and have been further developed and enhanced through my Master’s training in the School & Counselling Psychology program at the University of Saskatchewan. This, combined with my previous training and volunteer experience (with the Healing Journey Project and both Sexual Assault Centres) as well as my naturally caring, empathic, and non-judgmental approach assisted my ability to develop rapport with each of my participants. I anticipate that this has in turn led to a deeper level of trust and comfort in which to disclose personal and sensitive information, resulting in deeper, richer descriptions of the phenomena.

Through collaboration and mutuality, “engagement, empathy, and emotional involvement with participants’ worlds lead to deeper understanding of those worlds” (Morrow, 2007, p. 218). The relational, collaborative process of research has specific implications for working with survivors of CSA, as these participants “described their experiences of collaborative meaning-making as ‘important’ and ‘empowered’” (Morrow & Smith, 1995, p. 132). Morrow and Smith (1995) suggest that it is promising that data-analysis can be an empowering model for both participants and researchers.

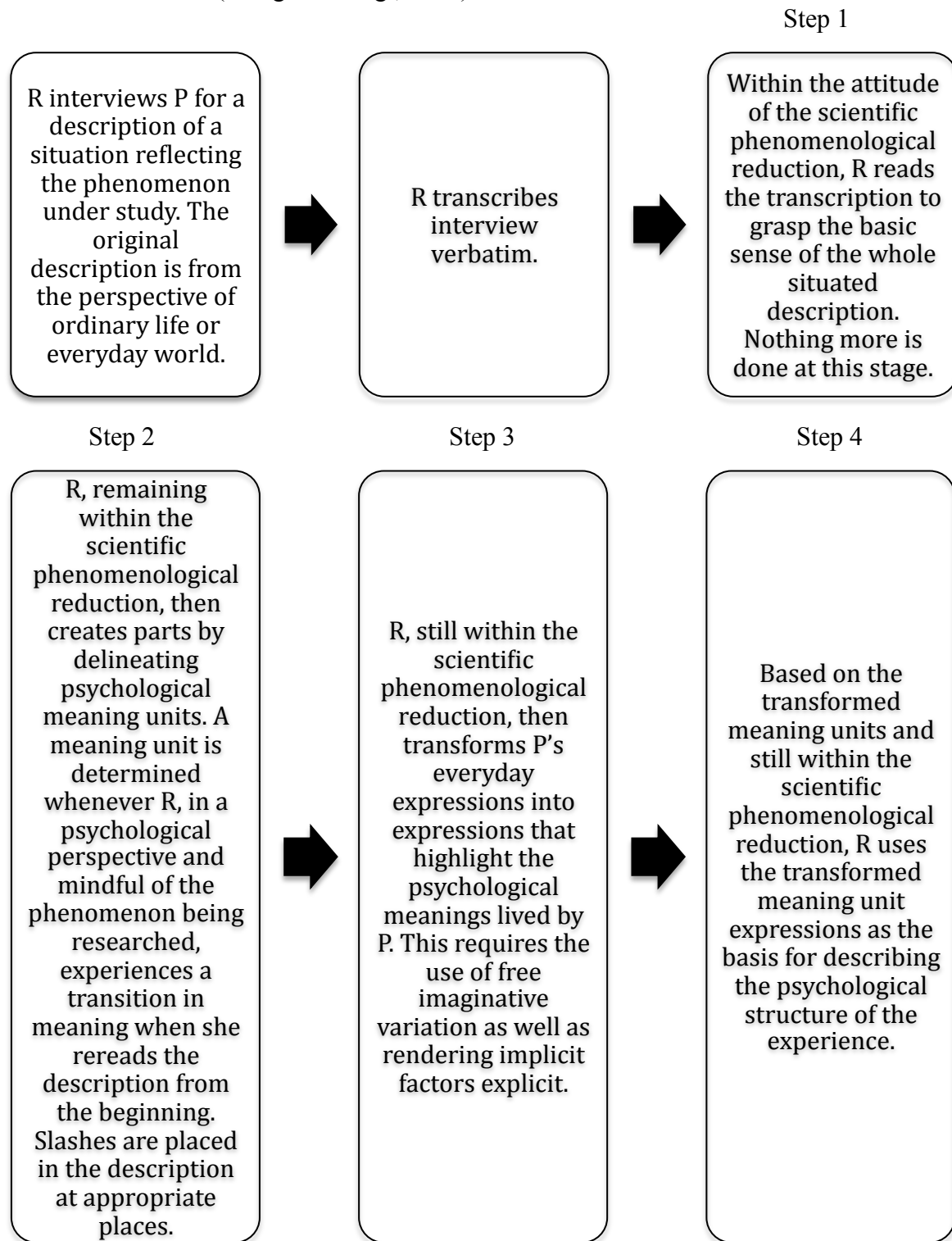
Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis is an iterative rather than a linear or stepwise process (Richards & Morse, 2007). Data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection in qualitative research and commences upon completion of the first interview (Merriam, 2002a). This is beneficial as it allows for adjustments to be made during the research process, “even to the point of redirecting data collection, and to ‘test’ emerging concepts, themes, and categories against subsequent data” (Merriam, 2002b, p. 14). The process of reading, reflection, writing and

rewriting is fundamental for phenomenological researchers to be able to “transform the lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). I have used Giorgi’s phenomenological method of data analysis (as described by Langdridge, 2007). According to Langdridge (2007), the four stages of data analysis are: 1) reading for a sense of the whole; 2) identifying meaning units; 3) assessing meaning units; and, 4) synthesizing meaning units.

Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) designed a flow chart in order to summarize the method and to illustrate that “each step of the method is a finer and more particular analysis built on the previous step” (p. 253). These steps build upon each other until the fourth and final step, which then returns to a holistic account of the lived experience, from a psychological perspective (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Figure 3.1 is an adaptation of the summarization of the four stages of Giorgi’s empirical phenomenology data analysis.

Figure 3 – 1 Flowchart Demonstrating the Steps of Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003)



R = researcher

P = participant

Reading for a Sense of the Whole

Following the transcription of the first interview, the data was read in its entirety as “the phenomenological perspective is a holistic one” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 251). This allowed for a global sense of the data (Giorgi, 1997). Data analysis should not commence prior to having an “overall sense of the description” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252), as this global sense facilitates determining how the parts are constituted (Giorgi, 1997). It was necessary to complete this step for each individual (Langdridge, 2007). Transcribing the interviews afforded the opportunity of having a thorough examination of the data, and the transcriptions were read several times over in their entirety. It is important that the process of epoché be attended to during these early and initial readings, as these readings are to be done with a sense of discovery, and should not result in any kind of interpretation of the data (Langdridge, 2007). The only goal at this stage is to learn and understand the participants’ language and to “grasp a sense of the whole” of their experience (de Castro, 2003, p. 50). Once a general sense is grasped upon reading the text, it is not examined or interrogated further and it is not made explicit, but it provides the foundation for the following step (Giorgi, 1985).

Identifying Meaning Units

The second stage of phenomenological data analysis involves breaking the text down into smaller units of meaning. This process involves working systematically through the text in order to identify meaning-units. de Castro (2003) suggests that the aim of identifying meaning units is not to provide an explanation at this stage, but to “divide the description into smaller and more manageable units or blocks” so that a more detailed analysis can be done. Table 3.1 provides examples of identified meaning units under the left column “Original Text.”

Table 3 – 1 Meaning-unit analysis

Original Text	Description by Meaning Unit	Psychological Significance	Phenomenological Significance
“John and Sarah are amazing people of God. And, and, uh, yes, he led me through the whole process.” J	Janet identified these people in her life as being ‘amazing people’ assisting her through the healing process.	Support both emotionally, psychologically and physically.	Support by ‘bringing me to the shore’.
“....when he came in [to the church], I rebelled and went out because I didn’t want to be from the same thing as him and then there was also of course that he would be the head of the house.” D	Dawn identified her father as the patriarch of her home.	Male dominance & patriarchy that she was made to be a part of	Patriarchy
“But, the whole thing about ‘honouring thy mother and father’, I would question that constantly. Constantly.” M	At a very early age Marie began to question the submissiveness that was occurring through the abuse.	Questioning not only the religious doctrine she had been taught but also the supremacy of control and leadership that she had been brought up with, therefore honouring her mother and father.	Interpretations of Religious Teachings and the beginnings of her Awakening about power structure and submissiveness.

In attempting to determine units of meaning, Langdridge (2007) outlined two limitations to the analysis. First, the analyst should “adopt a psychological attitude towards the text” as this is a psychological project (Langdridge, 2007, p. 89). In other words, identification will occur through a psychological lens, in which “issues appropriate for a psychological investigation” arise, such as “emotions, beliefs, or behaviours” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 89). Secondly, the analyst must set boundaries to the meaning-units identified that are specific to the topic at hand. A final issue that Giorgi (1985) delineated is that at this stage, rather than understanding meaning-units as an element of the whole, meaning-units are constituents, to be understood in context (Langdridge, 2007). Langdridge (2007) described it this way:

Constituents are those parts of a piece of text whose meaning can only be understood in context, while elements are those parts whose meaning can be understood independent of the context. Very crudely, a word would be an example of a constituent, for its meaning may change depending on the context (the sentence of which it is a part), while a letter is an example of an element, as the meaning does not change according to context (where it is in a word). (p. 89)

Assessing Meaning Units

The third stage of Giorgi’s data analysis process is to assess the psychological significance of the meaning units as some of the units will be psychologically relevant and others will not be meaningful (Langdridge, 2007). By reading and re-reading the meaning units and by practicing imaginative variation, the psychological meaning of the units derived in the previous step can be identified and determined (Langdridge, 2007). Polkinghorne (1989) explained imaginative variation as being:

A type of mental experimentation in which the researcher intentionally alters, through imagination, various aspects of the experience, either subtracting from or adding to the proposed transformation. The point of free variation is to imaginatively stretch the proposed transformation to the edges until it no longer describes the experience underlying the subject’s naïve description. The use of these processes is to enable the researcher to produce meaning transformations on which there is consistent intersubjective agreement. (p. 55)

The critical component of assessing meaning units is that analysis moves from identifying idiosyncratic detail to more general meaning (Langdridge, 2007), and that

participants' everyday language is transformed by the researcher to be expressed in terms of relevant language to the discipline of psychology (Giorgi, 1997). Table 3.1 shows an example of how the original text was translated into less idiosyncratic language under the "Description by Meaning Unit" column (Langdridge, 2007). The "Psychological Significance" column is "the further translation into language representing the psychological significance of the units" and "involves some initial synthesis of meaning-units as they are combined to represent larger units of psychological meaning" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 95). The far right column "Phenomenological Significance" was added to assist in further meaning unit assessment.

Synthesizing Meaning Units

The fourth stage involves producing structural descriptions for each participant followed by a final general structural description that encompasses all participant accounts (Langdridge, 2007). Langdridge (2007) explained this process as involving "an attempt to synthesize the psychological units of meaning by identifying the key elements for the phenomenon being described and then writing this up as a brief (chronological) account for each participant (the individual structural description)" (p. 90). The individual structural description was developed and given to each participant at the second interview in order for participants to review and confirm the accuracy of these accounts. The difference between the individual and general structural descriptions is that the former follows the concrete and specific individual description more closely, and the latter "tries as much as possible to depart from the specifics to communicate the most general meaning of the phenomena" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 20).

Upon completion of individual structural descriptions, identification of uniform characteristics across descriptions can occur in order to produce a general structural description (Langdridge, 2007). Husserl termed this process *eidetic intuition*, moving from the individual to the universal (Langdridge, 2007). The analysis described in the previous stages leads to the generation of the final structural description and "represents the essence (invariant core common to all similar experiences) of the phenomenon being investigated" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 90). Giorgi (1997) suggested for simplicity that researchers attempt "to derive a single structure (synthesis) for all of the subjects in the study" (para. 32). However, if the data does not lend itself to this process, the data should not be forced to fit into a single structure and as many structures as are required to encompass the meaning units should be derived (Giorgi, 1997).

Giorgi (1997) suggested that “structures can be understood as essences and their relationships” (para. 34).

Quality Criteria

According to Giorgi (2002), the phenomenological perspective of validity pertains to the role of subjectivity within the research. Knowledge is correlated with subjectivity, and the question of validity within phenomenology is to determine how valid and correct knowledge is by understanding the conditions under which it was obtained (Giorgi, 2002). In other words, Langdrige (2007) posited: “how do we know whether the knowledge that has been apprehended and claimed is valid – apprehended as it really is – rather than invalid – distorted through the over-imposition of subjectivity?” (p. 155). The conditions through which the data was obtained, in this case, rich, thick descriptions of participants and their experiences, contributes to the validity of the research (Giorgi, 2002). Langdrige (2007) suggested that the key for descriptive phenomenologists is “for the researcher to be fully present to the phenomenon being investigated, such that the researcher is able to derive a structural understanding of the experience being described” (p. 155).

The paradigm assumptions of the researcher influence the choice of quality criteria procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Morrow, 2005). *Trustworthiness* is one of the labels that constructivists place on validity in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), and having an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, it is appropriate for the present research. The four criteria that Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed to ensure *trustworthiness* are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Three of these criteria: credibility, transferability, and dependability have been found to be appropriate and consistent with phenomenological methods (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Among these criteria, the specific methodological strategies for demonstrating the quality of the research included in the present research are: member checking, peer review/debriefing, audit trail, and positionality.

Credibility

The credibility criteria involves establishing credibility or believability from the perspective of participants. With the purpose of the current research having been to describe an experience or phenomena from the perspective of the experiencer, participants are therefore the only legitimate candidates who can judge the credibility of the results (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

As was previously stated, all interviews were audio taped and transcribed with printed copies given to each participant. This served as a validity check by allowing each woman the opportunity to read over and edit her own transcript to ensure that each interview was completely and accurately transcribed and to ensure the integrity of her data. As each woman reviewed her respective transcript and indicated her satisfaction with the data, a final data set emerged.

An additional strategy for achieving credibility from a phenomenological perspective is through the process by which the researcher is able to demonstrate the integrity of the research process (Worthen, 2002) through “a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (Merriam, 2002a, p. 31). Techniques such as: member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nkongho, 2006), peer review (Merriam, 2002a), or peer debriefing (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006), and audit trails (Merriam, 2002a) were used to enhance accuracy of the data and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2002a; Morrow, 2007) of the analysis (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Merriam, 2002a; Morrow, 2007).

Member checking. The process of member checking was done by taking the data and tentative interpretations back to the women to confer with them regarding the degree to which the researcher had captured the essence of their experiences (Hycner, 1985; Merriam, 2002a). Each woman was given a copy of her individual interview transcription prior to the second interview for an opportunity to review the descriptions (Hein & Austin, 2001). The purpose of the second interview was to allow the women the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher upon checking for accuracy in their individual descriptions and making any necessary modifications such as adding, deleting, or changing information (Hein & Austin, 2001). Each of the women also read a description of their lived experience and confirmed its accuracy.

Peer review/debriefing. Another strategy for enhancing the credibility of the research findings is the process of peer review or peer debriefing. Peer reviewing allows for the sharing of text with advisers, consultants, reviewers, or colleagues (van Manen, 1994) who provide “ongoing critiques of the analysis, searching for gaps, unchecked biases, inconsistencies, and alternative interpretations” (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006, p. 321). In a sense, this peer review or peer debriefing is automatically built in to thesis writing as graduate students have a committee whose members read and comment on the study throughout the research process (Merriam, 2002a). This committee may enhance the rigor of the study and safeguard the study’s credibility by challenging any evidence of bias or overt emotional persuasion in the data

analysis. The present study was reviewed by the advisor and committee members, who provided comments and critiques. The process of peer reviewing has also enhanced the dependability of the present study analysis.

Audit trail. Finally, the study's trustworthiness can be enhanced through the audit trail or "transparency of method" which Merriam (2002a) describes as: "the explanation of the methods of the study, how the sample was selected, how the data were collected and analyzed" (Merriam, 2002a, p. 21), and how trustworthiness was addressed. Merriam (2002a) used the analogy of an auditor to describe the audit trail: "just as an auditor authenticates the accounts of a business, independent readers can authenticate the findings of a study by following the trail of the researcher" (p. 27). In addition to assisting with bracketing, keeping a research journal also provided an audit trail (Merriam, 2002a). The research journal helped to illuminate "reflections, questions, and decisions on the problems, issues, ideas" that I encountered during the data generation process (Merriam, 2002a, p. 27), and an excerpt was included in the final chapter of this research.

Positionality. The appropriate standards for evaluating the trustworthiness of a study are largely determined by the paradigm in which the research is grounded (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Merriam, 2002a; Morrow, 2005; Morrow, 2007). As researchers position themselves vis-à-vis their research, and as they explicitly state their assumptions, biases, and presuppositions, this leads to a level of honesty, which in turn contributes to the trustworthiness of the study (Morrow, 2005). Research credibility is enhanced through congruency between purpose and paradigm (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Given the thorough and extensive discussion previously in this chapter, I believe that an adequate demonstration of compatibility between the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm and the phenomenological methodology has transpired.

Transferability

Transferability is essentially determined by the reader; thus no definitive claims will be made regarding how these results might apply to others (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006). However, rich and detailed descriptions of the findings are provided in order to assist readers in making decisions regarding transferability (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Creswell, 1998), as personal validation is demonstrated through findings that resonate with others who have had similar experiences (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002a; Worthen, 2002). This is known as the *phenomenological nod*.

Rich descriptions include words of “the context, the participants involved, and the activities of interest” rather than numbers in order to “convey what the researcher has learned about the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002b, p. 5). Morrow (2007) outlined that “the research context must include sufficient information about the researcher’s perspective, the participants themselves, and the research process that the audience can assess the relevance, or transferability, of the findings to her or his own context” (p. 219).

Dependability

Rather than being forced to duplicate study results, “reliability lies in others’ concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable” (Merriam, 2002a, p. 27). Some of the strategies that were used in the present study to strengthen the study’s dependability are: peer review/debriefing, the investigator’s position (reflexivity), and the audit trail. Peer review and audit trails have been previously discussed, however, the investigator’s position is the “critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” (Merriam, 2002a p. 31). The process of reflexivity has commenced at the onset of the present study and has been made explicit in the introduction chapter as well as the beginning of this chapter.

Ethical Considerations

An application was made to the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB), and the ethical guidelines outlined by this board were followed for the present study. Ethical practices such as, consent; study methods and procedures; data storage; dissemination of results; risks, benefits, and deception; confidentiality; data/transcript release; and, debriefing and feedback are outlined.

Informed Consent

I have closely followed all of the ethical guidelines made by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) for human subjects. Specifically, I drafted a Consent Form (Appendix E) which included elements recommended by Groenewald (2004): individuals are voluntarily participating in research, the purpose and procedures of the research, possible risks and benefits to participating, the right to withdraw consent to participate at any time, and the procedures followed to protect confidentiality.

Although it was not needed, there was protocol in place in the event that written consent could not be given, for example, in the instance of illiteracy. In this case, consent may have been given verbally with all information from the consent form read out loud to the participants who were unable to give written consent. Where consent could not be obtained in written form, it would have been documented how consent was recorded.

Confidentiality is another ethical issue that was granted special consideration, given the sensitive nature of the present research. All measures were taken in order to ensure confidentiality as much as possible. Participants were verbally informed at the initial meeting and in writing to their rights of confidentiality. All data was coded, and the women were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality throughout the duration of the study and upon completion. All other identifying information was either altered or deleted in order to maintain confidentiality. Each case was coded individually and individual quotes were isolated. Participants were given the opportunity to review and revise all transcribed data as they saw fit, and each gave permission to include excerpts of verbatim material.

Impacts of the Research: Caring for Participants and Self-Care

Other ethical considerations that van Manen (1994) highlighted are the possible effects that research has on the people that are studied, the researchers, and the institutions in which the research is conducted. These may include feelings of “discomfort, anxiety, false hope, superficiality, guilt, self-doubt, irresponsibility – but also hope, increased awareness, moral stimulation, insight, a sense of liberation, a certain thoughtfulness, and so on” (van Manen, 1994, p. 162). In the event that participants experienced distress as a result of the research process, a list of appropriate referrals (Appendix G) for support and counselling was given to each woman along with the consent form (Appendix E). These resources were situated in the city and area in which the interviews took place and had a range of fees including ‘free of charge’ and ‘sliding scale’ (dependant on income). Although none of the women indicated that they had needed these services, one of the women mentioned having had a difficult time after the initial interview as a result of feelings that resurfaced due to the CSA. She indicated that had she needed to, she would have considered one of the resources, but she felt competent to work through her struggle on her own accord (having had previous counselling which gave her tools for coping).

The research may have also lead to new levels of self-awareness, possible lifestyle changes, and shifts in priorities, or if done poorly, the methods may have resulted in feelings of

anger, disgust, defeat, intolerance, or insensitivity (van Manen, 1994). The women, in general, spoke quite positively of the experience. Although they did not enjoy reliving their past trauma, it helped remind them of how much they had been through and the strength that they had not only to survive their experience, but to thrive despite their experience.

For the researcher, a transformation may occur leading to “deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness and tact, and so on” (van Manen, 1994, p. 162). However, research of this nature can potentially have negative effects on the researcher as well. The effects of trauma can greatly impact empathetic listeners who bear witness, risking the emotional convergence within the trauma (Cloitre, Cohen, & Koenen, 2006). “As Euripides said several thousand years ago, ‘where there are two, one cannot be wretched and one not’” (Bloom & Reichert, 1998, p. 145). Therefore, in an attempt to minimize the potentially negative effects of being involved in research of this nature, and to remain effective, I have practiced self-care throughout the duration of the present research and beyond.

Cloitre et al. (2006) outlined several of the practices in which they engage as trauma therapists that are also appropriate for CSA researchers. They recommended seeking consultation, advice, support, and wisdom from trauma therapists regarding the challenges of working with survivors. In addition, they suggested that being cognizant of scheduling (avoiding clusters of appointments together) and by taking occasional breaks from the research and interviews allows for relaxation time and an opportunity to debrief with others. Finally, they also believed in the practice of finding a healthy balance in life through proper diet, regular exercise, and pleasurable activities with an emphasis on monitoring and appreciating personal limitations. These are all realistic and necessary activities that have guided me through my research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of the present study was to explore the lived experience of spiritual coping among adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Giorgi's (1985; 1997; 2002; 2003; 2005; 2006) empirical phenomenological method was used to examine each woman's account of her lived experience with CSA and spiritual coping. This chapter presents descriptions of the meaning of spiritual coping among adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse as the purpose of phenomenological analysis is to clarify the meaning of a phenomena rather than explain or identify causes of a phenomena (Giorgi, 2005). Clarifying the meaning of phenomena provides an understanding of the possible ways in which human beings might "act in the world or in relation to others" (Giorgi, 2005, p. 77), and occurs through the identification of invariants and essential structure(s) of the particular phenomena.

From the women's accounts emerged the *key constituents*, or *invariants*, which in relationship to other invariants, form the essential structure of the lived experience of spiritual coping among adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The essential structure(s) of a phenomenon are the components of the lived experience that cannot be altered in any way in order for that particular phenomenon to exist (Giorgi, 1997; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Wertz, 2005). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) stated: "The structure is gained by going over the last transformations of meaning units and attempts to determine what constituents are typically essential in order to account for the concrete experiences reported" (p. 46). The essential structure is not meant to be a universal account of the lived experiences of participants, but rather, due to the role that context plays, is a way to generalize the experience of women survivors of childhood sexual abuse who have experienced spiritual coping (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The invariants are described in detail, followed by the essential structure.

Prior to the presentation of the invariants and essential structure, a brief account of each participant will be provided in order to situate them in the research. As well, the following definition of spiritual coping is provided as a reminder of the phenomena at hand: Spiritual coping is "the use of spiritual beliefs or behaviours to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances" (Koenig et al., 1998, p. 513).

Situated Descriptions

According to Langdridge (2007), the amount of participant information provided to contextualize phenomenological analysis varies, but generally includes the participants' age, gender, ethnicity, and occupation. By providing mini-biographies for each of the participants, the extent to which maximum variation sampling has occurred is clear (Langdridge, 2007). The following is a brief description of each of the women and their experiences. The women have chosen a pseudonym in order to protect their privacy and ensure their confidentiality.

Marie

At the time of the initial interview, Marie identified as being a married, 48 year-old Métis woman. She had an undergraduate degree in social work and was employed full-time as a support worker/counsellor. She currently practices Aboriginal spirituality but was raised Catholic. Marie expressed doubts about and questioned traditional biblical teachings, God, and Catholicism because of her childhood sexual abuse and therefore began exploring alternatives to Christianity. She explored different forms of religion at various times of her life; she was seeking safety, belonging, and comfort. She views the spirituality that she practices now as simple and uncomplicated.

Marie's sexual abuse started when she began wearing a back brace for her scoliosis, which her dad helped her put on every morning and night because he was the only one strong enough to tie it as tight as it needed to be. When her dad helped her with it at night, he would wait for an hour until her mom was asleep and then sneak back into her room. The abuse started with grooming through affectionate acts and then escalated. He raped her up until she was married at age 17. A neighbour man also sexually abused Marie when she was 15 years old.

Marie described her teenage years as being extremely chaotic. She used substances such as drugs and alcohol extensively, and engaged in self-harm behaviours such as: sex with many partners, sexual favours for drugs, 'self-cutting', and suicide attempts. Marie described herself as rebelling against authority by acting out, skipping school, and running away. She also got married at a very young age in order to get out of her parents' house. The intimate relationships that she entered into as an adult were all abusive, with the exception of her current marriage, which she entered into relatively recently.

Janet

At the time of the initial interview, Janet described herself as a 47 year-old woman from a Norwegian descent. She was married with a high school diploma and had worked as a real estate agent before her recent retirement. Janet grew up in a home with a mother who was a non-practicing Christian and a father who was a professed atheist. However, Janet had neighbours who took her and her sister to church weekly and she grew up Pentecostal. At age 15, Janet “just turned one day and walked away from the Lord.” She felt that God became present again in her life following a serious illness she experienced at the age of 42. After years of departure, although maintaining Christian beliefs, she has since returned to Christianity in the Alliance faith.

Janet described her home as lacking normalcy as her dad physically and sexually abused both her and her sister. Her dad did not begin to sexually abuse Janet until her older sister had left home. He would take the opportunity to sexually abuse her while her mom was out working in the garden, which she did frequently early in the morning. Janet’s mother worked around the house until midnight or one in the morning and then began working around the house just hours later, at four or five o’clock in the morning. Janet’s mom worked long hours in order to avoid being with her husband who was incredibly controlling and sexually perverted. Janet’s father would not allow her mom to go out or have friends. The only control that her mom had in her life was regarding her eating, and so she became anorexic. Janet described her mom as being controlling and abusive as well. She shared that her mom had obsessive-compulsive behaviours when it came to things such as cleaning, and that her mom had also attempted suicide. Her parents had experienced intergenerational abuse with her mom having been sexually abused by her own dad and Janet’s dad having been sexually abused by his grandfather. In addition to having experienced sexual abuse by her dad, boys at school also sexually and physically abused Janet, and her first marriage was also abusive. Janet described coping through avoidance, humour, and obsessive-compulsive behaviours.

Dawn

At the time of the initial interview, Dawn, a 45 year-old Caucasian woman, was in a same-sex relationship. She had two undergraduate degrees, as well as two years of Bible College. She was employed full-time with 2 casual positions in the human services field. Although Dawn was raised Pentecostal, she described herself as being an “agnostic approaching

atheist,” and having no current religious affiliation. After spending some time in her early twenties in the Catholic faith and then exploring Biblical Feminism and Christian Feminism, she mentioned developing an affinity for Buddhism and an interest in Aboriginal spirituality.

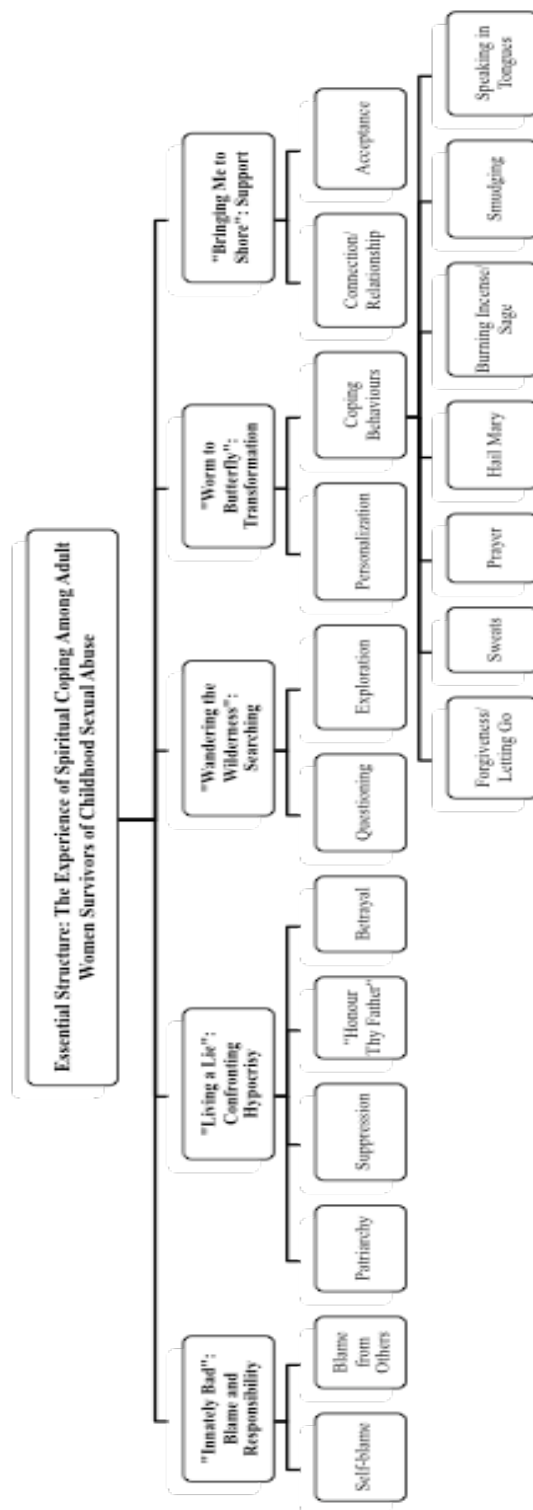
Dawn indicated that her father used to watch her undress and so she would categorize her experience of sexual abuse as “voyeurism.” She also talked about having earlier memories of abuse that were not really clear, so she had to deal with the emotions she felt about the abuse rather than the memories. Similarly, she had little memory of being abused by her older sister until a cousin confirmed it for her several years later. Because her awareness of the abuse did not materialize until later in her adolescence, she did not start working on her sexual abuse until her early twenties. During this time she attended a year of counselling and began to explore different experiences with spirituality.

Dawn stated that she does not currently experience negative effects relating to her experience of childhood sexual abuse. If anything, she claimed that her experience has helped her to be more aware or in tune with other survivors she has worked with. However, in the past, she was suicidal, and used ‘self-cutting’ and alcohol as ways of coping.

Invariant Meanings

The purpose of the present study was to discover the essential structure of spiritual coping as experienced by adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In order to examine the essential structure, it is necessary to first present the invariants as it is through the interrelationships of the invariants that they “converge and coalesce,” revealing the essential structure (Laird, 2008). As I started working with the invariants, I created a graphical depiction in order to make sense of the interrelationships between the invariants (see Figure 4-1).

Figure 4 – 1 Representation of the Relationship Between Invariants and the Essential Structure of Spiritual Coping Among Adult Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse



Five invariants emerged from the discussions with the three women about their experience with spiritual coping in relation to CSA, which coalesce into the essential structure. These invariants were: “Innately Bad:” Blame and Responsibility; “Living a Lie:” Confronting Hypocrisy; “Wandering the Wilderness:” Searching; “Worm to Butterfly:” Transformation; and “Bringing Me to Shore:” Support. “Each of the invariant meanings presented here is revelatory of the experience of *all* of the [women] in the participant group” (Laird, 2008, p. 154).

“Innately Bad:” Blame and Responsibility

The first invariant that emerged from the data “*Innately Bad:” Blame and Responsibility*, consists of two concepts: *Self-blame*, and *Blame from others*. Self-blame and the blame from others that the women experienced impeded their spiritual coping. The impact that this blame had on their spiritual coping resulted from the women holding either their previous religion responsible for judging them and attempting to hold them accountable for their share in the abuse, or they perceived that people, particularly within the church, contributed to the blame they felt. Often times, the self-blame that the women experienced was reinforced by comments or responses from others, or what the women assumed would be others’ reactions to the sexual abuse. This projection reinforced the sense of responsibility that the women assumed for their sexual abuse.

Self-blame. Self-blame is commonly experienced among adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. All three of the women identified self-blame within their experiences. They each felt that at the time of the abuse there was something that they either did to provoke or encourage the abuse, or that there was something that they could have done to prevent or stop the abuse. For example, Janet shared:

I guess what I should have done was take my clothes into the bathroom. You know, I look at 47 [my current age] and think now, why didn’t I just every night, go and dress in the bathroom, walk out in my pyjamas, and go to bed?

Marie expressed that the religion of her upbringing made it more difficult for her to deal with her sexual abuse in the sense that she perceived a great deal of responsibility and therefore self-blame for the abuse that was occurring. She described a sense of conflict due to the disparate religious positions held by her perpetrators. The contrast between experiencing abuse by her dad, who was a professed atheist, and her neighbour, who was a church-going Catholic man caused her angst. Before the abuse by her neighbour started, she believed that her dad could not help

himself because he was an evil person as he did not believe in God and was not baptized. However, when her neighbour also started abusing her, it caused Marie a great deal of confusion. She believed that because her neighbour was a “church-going, Catholic man” that he should know better and that church-going, God-believing people would never hurt anyone. She interpreted this conflict as validation and reinforcement that she must be the one to blame for the abuse. For her it was one thing if her dad was abusing her, but now the neighbour was also abusing her, she stated: “I must be making them do this. My dad used to use that ‘look what you made me do’, stuff like that. So then, it was like ‘Ok. It must be – it must be me.’”

Arriving at the conclusion that she must have been to blame led Marie to explore alternatives to the religion of her upbringing. She began to explore the satanic bible as a means of understanding herself and making sense of her experience. She questioned: “I must be some kind of demon or possessed – all this evil shit keeps happening to me. What is wrong with me?” Intertwined with that was her belief: “well if I’m such a bad person, it’s not going to matter what I do. It’s not going to save me. I’m just ‘unsaveable’.”

Marie also talked about feeling like she was “doomed to hell” because she did not disclose her sexual abuse to the priest in confession. This caused her to worry for years as she stated that her biggest fear was being responsible for her dad abusing someone else because she had not stopped him by disclosing her own abuse. She also felt that she could not confess because she would also have to admit that she was having sex with three to four guys a month. Marie thought that if the priest spoke with her mom and her mom found out that she was having random sex, it would mean, “I really was a slut and I got everything I deserved.” Alternatively, Marie worried that she would not have been believed: “I used to think the priest would believe my mom. I didn’t think anyone would believe me.”

The responsibility and self-blame that Dawn experienced was, from her perspective, directly related to her religious upbringing and teachings:

but certainly in relation to the women – the woman is responsible for the guy’s hard on, right? I mean, that’s Augustine and the whole church belief system. And that was even in bible college where (laugh) you know, if the guy was feeling aroused or whatever, some of them – not all of them certainly um, but there was the belief that she [the woman] then is responsible for his erection, for his arousal, for his umm...experience of that, right? He’s not responsible. He’s not responsible for rape – he’s not – and sometimes even like

taught in classes or whatever where there was an acceptance that that's the deal. *She's* responsible. Um, so I think in terms of getting over...uh, the sexual abuse, there was also the belief on my part – even though one of my abusers was female and my sister – that I was responsible for that, right? If people are aroused by you, then you're responsible for that. And that's part of what my *religion* (laugh) um, reinforced...was that I was responsible for that.

Even though Dawn was able to establish that this way of thinking, blaming women for sexual violence, was incorrect after coming into Biblical Feminism, “it still took awhile for that to process through and for me to actually believe that and work through that.”

Although Dawn admitted that she likely would have experienced self-blame, she claimed that religion reinforced that belief:

I also felt shame and guilt about my abuse that it made me damaged. I felt like some of the religion I had believed in helped reinforce this “apartness,” this “you are bad if you do not believe the same, you are bad” because some flaw in me brought about the abuse. I somehow caused it, invited it.

Dawn could not attribute her spiritual quest solely to her experience of sexual abuse as she felt that there was a culmination of events and circumstances that led her to abandon her religious upbringing in search of spirituality that was more congruent with her beliefs: “They were both [sexual abuse and religion] points of vulnerability as was my sexuality. Both [sexual abuse and sexuality] were things for which one could be judged and blamed.” However, she explained that the self-blame she experienced as a result of the sexual abuse was one of the main contributing factors that caused her enough pain to prompt her to seek a different spirituality. Dawn decided that her previous religion no longer contributed anything to her life. She stated that the church “would far more likely condemn me, pity me, judge me, or ignore me or judge him [my dad] rather than being a place of help.” As such, neither Dawn, nor Janet or Marie were able to continue on in the religion of their upbringing in the same form, which they originally practiced.

Blame from others. Marie experienced more blame when she disclosed her abuse to her first husband because he would rape her and tell her “Well, your dad did it to you, and you liked it.” Further reinforcing her self-blame and guilt were Janet's beliefs about how people would

react to her disclosure. These beliefs were based on the responsibility that she felt society places on survivors. She shared:

If I would've been able to say to someone at twelve years old "Here's what goes on in my house," then I think they would have said "Well, then you need to run and tell the authorities" or "You need to not sit on daddy's lap" or "You need to tell daddy you are angry at him, and he is not gonna do this [abuse] anymore."

When Janet disclosed her abuse as an adult and began to work through the impacts the sexual abuse had on her life, she was worried her friends and family members would abandon her as a result of the judgment: "you know what, you need to go now 'cause you are so bad." Janet expected her husband to say "you know what, this can't go on anymore." However, that was not their response and as her spiritual journey progressed and she felt God's love, Janet began to overcome her self-blame. Janet feels that there are those who may still blame her: "there probably still would be people today that if we had this conversation, they would say, 'Then you provoked it [the abuse]. You still sat on his lap.'" However, she now dismisses them because of their ignorance: "they have never walked that [abuse] journey." As an adult reflecting back on her sexual abuse experience through the lens provided by her new spirituality, Janet realizes that she does not hold responsibility for any of the abuse:

Today it doesn't matter. Today I know – and, and so many people would say, "well they must have done something to deserve it [the abuse]. They must have done something to keep egging it on." Um, I know as a child...um...you don't do anything to egg it on, that's for sure.

Dawn observed other women in her church that disclosed their experiences of abuse and did not find "a warm, accepting, supportive environment for telling their stories." These negative reactions compelled Dawn to remain silent about her own abuse, furthering the blame that she experienced. She believed that the spirituality and religion that she grew up in would have blamed her:

"You must have asked for it [abuse] in blaming." Yeah, because you must have done something to solicit that [abuse] and everything else. That was my belief system around that and so I had to shed that [belief system] in terms of healing.

A sense of shame, responsibility, and self-blame was experienced by all three women and appeared to be made worse by their religious upbringings. Their religious upbringings

interrupted their spiritual coping as the women felt blame and judgment from people within their church or the teachings of the church, reinforcing their self-blame. The interruption that the women experienced regarding their spiritual coping can be seen as a form of negative spiritual coping. According to Dawn,

So, I think in some ways ‘Religion’ if you want to confuse it with ‘Spirituality’ can have a very negative impact um, on survivors. Because it can reinforce a lot of blame and shame and false responsibility for the abuse. And that was some of my experience.

Therefore, the women could not possibly remain in the churches they were raised in if they hoped to survive and heal from the sexual abuse. Ultimately, the new spirituality the women adopted facilitated the women’s coping, allowing them to frame the abuse in a more realistic, non-blaming, non-judgmental way.

“Living a Lie:” Confronting Hypocrisy

The second invariant “*Living a Lie:” Confronting Hypocrisy*, consists of *Patriarchy*, *Suppression*, “*Honour thy Father,*” and *Betrayal*. These components prompted the women to grapple with their religious teachings and upbringings and confront the hypocrisy they experienced. The perception that men were the head of the church and home resulted in secrecy and silence around the women’s sexual abuse, causing them to suppress and deny their experiences. Perhaps the most significant hypocrisy was the expectation that they were to honour their parents, even though their parents had betrayed them and were dishonouring them through the sexual abuse that the women experienced. The hypocrisy that the women faced within the religion of their upbringing as well as within their own homes impeded the women’s spiritual coping with their sexual abuse.

Patriarchy. The women had been taught certain views and beliefs about their religions from the perspective of what they considered to be a male dominated, patriarchal hierarchy. In addition to their experience of child sexual abuse, this perspective resulted in negative experiences with men, particularly their fathers. Among the three women, Dawn was the most vocal in her beliefs regarding the church as being patriarchal, male dominated, and controlling. Dawn claimed that, “Born again religion to some degree serves the interest of a male hierarchy.” She indicated that “The church hierarchy was all men, they were at the top, they were in charge, women were to shut up and put up with [abuse]. I grew up with a church of hell, fire, and brimstone.” Dawn began to question and challenge the idea that women were supposed to be

naturally submissive to men and that women were to blame for their abuse within the church: “It was kind of like ‘Put up with it. You have to be submissive. The man gets to rule his house.’” The combination of these perspectives, and the outlook that “women were just inherently worth less than men” did not make sense to Dawn. She began to realize that she no longer had a place in the church and recalled challenging God because she saw that the heads of the church were all men. She stated that if God condoned this church structure she could “no longer believe in a patriarchal God.”

Witnessing injustice within the church also led Dawn to challenge God. The fact that she saw that there were men in the church who abused their wives and escaped punishment reinforced to Dawn that God was somewhat tolerant of her continued abuse. She had to reframe her concept of God whom she felt was supposed to be about love, but was instead all about “judgment and fear,” an “old school God, fundamentalist God.” Dawn thought: “if God was that God [who was tolerant of abuse], definitely, that [Pentecostalism] was not the religion for me, because I didn’t have a place there anymore.”

Marie also talked about the Catholic Church being made up of men in positions of authority. Following her experience of sexual abuse and the male dominance that she viewed as being rampant within her church, Marie claimed to have issues with men, particularly men with authority: “that whole ‘man’, ‘authority man’ thing. I had issues with that.” Marie’s belief that the church reinforced male dominance and the subordination of women resulted from her mother’s inaction after learning that Marie was being sexually abused:

I think what I was questioning was my role as a woman. Because um, because my mom’s very Catholic beliefs and her you know, “it was a sacrament in front of God” and “I can’t leave” and all those things that I started thinking “Ok, so it doesn’t matter what my husband does, I have to stay there [in the marriage]. Like, this [way of life] is what I have to look forward to?” You know, it doesn’t matter if it’s good or if it’s bad, I just gotta put up with it [marriage]? So it was more, because I’m a woman I gotta tolerate all this stuff. You know, I mean I was tolerating the abuse because I was a woman, in my perception, and then I had this to look forward to? Like, I questioned – that’s what I was questioning. Was the whole role as a woman. That I really couldn’t say or do anything about none of it. “Man rules.” That’s kind of the message.

Marie perceived that women were viewed as mere servants to men within the

Catholic Church. This led her to believe that as a woman, she was worthless, which resulted in a feeling of hopelessness.

Although Janet did not specifically articulate the perspective that her religion was patriarchal, she did describe the male hierarchy within her home and the dominance of her father: You didn't deal with Dad and come out the winner. My dad was tough. My dad was a fighter. And if men didn't come out ahead, we [my mom, sister, and I] certainly weren't going to. So, that's probably what allowed him to...to um, get away with what he did [abuse] in a sense 'cause he was the only man [in the house]."

Janet described her home growing up as being very male dominated as her dad was incredibly controlling. She shared that she did not dare go against his instructions, and that most importantly and above all else, "you did not, you did not voice your opinion." From Janet's perspective, she had a "love-hate relationship" with her dad until the day he died because he was so controlling of her, even after her children were born: "I mean, we're talking control that is (laugh) above and beyond control."

Dawn articulated that it had initially been challenging for her to develop her spirituality because she saw her spirituality as being "part in parcel" with religion, and she had a negative view of religion. As Dawn left the church and worked through her sexual abuse, she saw ways in which religion reinforced the subordination and exploitation of women by men or within the family group. To Dawn it seemed that the church condoned sexual abuse, because she believed that the church permitted sexual abuse within the family and sexual abuse was therefore not considered abuse. Rather, she thought that child sexual abuse was almost normalized within the church and seen merely as an aspect of the experience of human sexuality:

I mean there's some beliefs out there in terms of knowing that human sexuality is going to happen and those sorts of things [sexual abuse] is not defined as abuse, but that that [sexual experience] should happen in the family. So that a man has the right to sexually abuse his wife, children, and whatever else because they're property. Some sense of feminist belief, but also reinforced by certain religions. Um, you also can beat your wife, etcetera, you know it's [spousal abuse] been reinforced in the law...um, certainly was a blatant belief or understanding...um...on the part of the religious belief that it was ok to sexually abuse your children.

The patriarchy and male dominance that the women were exposed to growing up contributed to the difficulties they experienced developing their spirituality and spiritual coping methods. The male hierarchical system that was inherent in their households and churches compounded the challenges they faced in making sense of their experiences of child sexual abuse. Thus, challenged the women's spiritual coping.

Suppression. As an extension of the patriarchal hierarchy that the women lived in, they experienced suppression of disclosing their child sexual abuse through silence and secrecy. In addition to normalizing child sexual abuse, Dawn believed that the church protected abusers by reinforcing men's position of dominance within the home and society, and endorsed silence and secrecy around sexual abuse:

I also saw the church as a sanctuary for abusers of all different types. Many of them in a general sense would endorse and support wife batterers [*sic*] and sexual abusers. Keep it [abuse] in the family, the right of men over their family. Subordination of women to men ideology I was learning in university. Where a man in his own home gets to call the shots. Where you sin to high heaven but can simply be forgiven. I saw the God of my church as ignoring the sexual abuse of women. It endorsed silence on issues of abuse; it was to be kept secret. Pray more, you dressed seductively.

Dawn described that her religion made dealing with her sexual abuse harder because she believed she was forced to suppress and deny her emotions: "In my religion of the past you had to hide everything [thoughts, beliefs, and feelings]. In the sexual abuse I also felt like I had to hide it." Dawn believed that it was not okay to feel angry and offered a teaching from the bible that indicates that if you think about doing something, it is the same thing as having done it:

if I fantasize about wanting to kill someone because I'm pissed off, right, couldn't use that [fantasy] as a coping mechanism, 'cause that meant that I actually wanted to do that. So that was something that was...uh...fucked up within that religion [Christianity], was that belief that thinking was the same as doing.

While growing up, Dawn was taught to suppress and deny her feelings, "I mean I was happy in church whether I was happy or not. It didn't matter what my true feelings were – you were taught to put on a face and put that forward." Janet also described having to wear a mask for the public. She illustrated what it was like to have to bury her feelings, only to have those feelings revealed years later after she disclosed her sexual abuse:

I think it would be like Mount St. Helen's did when it blew. You know, that stuffing and stuffing [feelings], and it's like a volcano and it turns and it turns and your stomach is so sick, you want to throw up, but you just paste that smile on there. Nobody has a clue what's going on [abuse]. And then to finally let that lid just blow and just let it spew out. . . it was so freeing for me.

Janet understood that the topic of sexual abuse was very different when she was a little girl because you couldn't talk about sexual abuse in church or society: "things were so different back then, you didn't talk about it [sexual abuse], you just moved on."

Marie was of the opinion that the Catholic Church also reinforced secrecy and silence as she perceived that the teachings and belief system were not explained, and simply expected to be followed. As such, Marie never felt as though it was acceptable to question aspects of her Catholic faith. Her curiosity was regarded as a challenge and a lack of faith:

It was like I didn't believe. You're just supposed to believe and not question. How dare you ask a priest about purgatory. I mean, I did [ask]. "What is this [purgatory]? How come we're the only ones [religion] that have it?" And it's just out of curiosity, but he took it as "Oh, you non-believer. Repent!"

As a result of the patriarchal hierarchy the women were raised in, they experienced secrecy and silence regarding their experiences of child sexual abuse. Each of the women perceived that their religions reinforced this suppression, which impeded their spiritual beliefs and resulted in their spiritual coping with child sexual abuse being more difficult. The patriarchy and suppression the women experienced led them to confront the hypocrisy they perceived in their lives which impacted their spiritual coping.

"Honour thy Father" The women each grappled with religious tenets or teachings, which greatly impacted their spiritual journeys. All three women spoke of or alluded to the biblical tenet of 'honouring thy parents', and specifically commented on what honouring their parents meant to them. Honouring their parents, specifically their fathers, was particularly challenging for the women and reinforced the sense of hypocrisy that they experienced.

For Janet, honouring her parents was something that she strove for regardless of her sexual abuse because she felt that biblically speaking, it was the right thing to do. As affirmation that the bible instructs to honour parents, she recited Deuteronomy 12: "obey my commands and it will go well with you. Obey your parents and your days will be long." When asked what it

meant to honour her parents, Janet stated that it meant to put them above herself regardless of what she is feeling on a given day and not to honour them just when everything is going well:

To me I'm very black and white, there is no gray and so, to me, it's very important to honour my mom and dad no matter, no matter that dad was a tyrant, no matter that he abused, no matter that in this day he would have been put in front of the courts, he would have probably been in jail. None of that really – like I don't go out and tell my story and tell my story...if someone is telling their story, I just let them. I just let it be...and to me that is honouring and when I say I miss my mom so much and I don't miss my dad, and in a way that is dishonouring him, and I really need to work on that...because that is not right.

While Janet felt it important to honour her parents, Marie struggled: “the whole thing about ‘honouring thy mother and father’ I would question that constantly. Constantly.” She shared:

Probably because going to the Ten Commandments, right, and in my early years, attending Catholic school, that was drilled into us. We had Religion just like Social or Math, right, and it was always about “honouring your mother and father” and you know, “respecting your mom and dad and their guidance” and all of that. And so, during the time – the years of the abuse, I was so confused “How do I honour my father when he's doing those things to me?” “How do I honour my mother when she's allowing that stuff?” you know, in my mind, she's allowing it. To her it was different, right. And so I was always confused about that “honouring” thing. And I think probably, now that I look back on things, that's probably why I stayed away from home so much. Was, I couldn't be there and not argue with them or talk back or whatever, right. So, I just stayed away.

The confusion that Marie felt regarding this tenet was one of the ways in which her spirituality made dealing with her sexual abuse harder. When Marie asked her priest what it meant to “honour you mother and father,” he responded that it meant that she had to listen to her parents and abide by their rules. Unfortunately, even though she felt that if she had disclosed the sexual abuse to the priest he would have responded differently, she felt like he was telling her that she had to put up with the abuse for some reason.

Although Dawn did not explicitly talk about the tenet “honour thy father and mother,” she did allude to it: “I grew up in a church where you are to respect your parents, one of which

was my father. He was to be respected simply because he was my father.” However, Dawn could not respect or honour her father as a result of the sexual abuse he perpetrated against her. The incongruency between what the church was teaching her and what she actually experienced caused dissonance for her, and she questioned the validity of her religion.

One of the main factors that influenced Dawn to leave the church was her father’s decision to join the church. She identified that his becoming involved with the church caused her to rebel because she did not want to be a part of “the same thing as him.” Although she believed that she would have left the church regardless, she shared that her dad’s transition into the church “made it much more blatantly apparent that it [Pentecostalism] did not fit me.” She shared, “There was not room for the both of us. He could have it [Pentecostal religion]; I was outta there [the church].” Dawn also believed that by taking on her Pentecostal faith, her father would become the head of the house, which she could not accept because of her lack of respect for him.

As an extension of being unable to respect her father, Dawn was unable to respect God because she described believing that God was endorsing the sexual abuse, “I remember very much it was in taking God to task in relation to my feminism (laugh). It was saying ‘No, I don’t want a patriarchal [*sic*] God.’” Dawn also said: “Somehow there are similarities between God of the church and my father in my mindset of the time. To me both were hypocritical at that point in my life.” This in turn caused her to “freak out at God” and sealed her decision to leave the church.

Dawn explained that for survivors of sexual abuse, having to obey your parents when you are being abused does not work because it ensures secrecy and continued abuse. Dawn believed that some religions would teach the tenet of obeying your parents rather than speaking up and challenging the abuse. Dawn reasoned that “it [the bible] doesn’t say to go off and find new parents if they’re abusing you. (Laugh) So, a lot of those things [tenets] did not fit and made it hard to speak up and speak about...um, initially, my sexual abuse.” If the church required her to honour her dad and he was sexually abusing her, she could not follow that tenet and therefore was in disagreement with the church and could no longer remain in it, following that God. Being forced to honour her parents and experiencing sexual abuse by her father was a catalyst for Dawn’s changing spirituality.

While all three of the women talked about honouring their parents, each one felt very differently about what that meant to her. For Janet, it was important to follow this tenet even

when she was not specifically in the church. For Marie, it made her question what she believed, and for Dawn, it significantly impacted her spiritual journey to the point that she left the Christian church.

Betrayal. The women were betrayed by their fathers who were supposed to be the very people responsible for protecting their daughters from harm but instead inflicted the abuse. Further, the women were also betrayed and abandoned by their mothers who were either in denial or chose to do nothing about the abuse. This sense of betrayal was experienced differently for each of the women.

Although Dawn described her mother's response to her disclosure of sexual abuse by her father as being predominantly positive and supportive, Dawn did not identify any action on her mother's behalf to protect Dawn from the continuation of the abuse. Similarly, Marie perceived that her mom was allowing the abuse to continue because when she disclosed to her mom, her mom did nothing to stop or prevent the sexual abuse from happening. It was not as though Marie's mom did not believe her, but she did not even promise Marie that the abuse would not happen anymore. In fact, Marie's mom refused to leave her husband because of the commitment she made before God, the holy vow of marriage. Her mom stated: "It's a sacred sacrament, and I swore to God. I made my bed and now I have to lay in it." Marie believed that nothing could be done about the abuse because her mom had made that vow to God. Marie's mom later admitted to Marie that she thought she had to keep the abuse secret, hidden, and pretend as though it were not happening because she would have been the one that looked bad if word got out. She believed that people would wonder how she could let the abuse happen in her family.

Marie's mother admitted to the shame and guilt that she felt as a result of her inaction towards Marie's sexual abuse, and her inability to handle Marie's abuse disclosure. As a result, her mother "just kind of blocked it out." Marie and her mother eventually discussed how that felt for each of them. Marie described how she was able to take herself out of the picture and be genuinely curious with her mom about what the whole experience was like for her. She shared that this process "helped me then to understand her [mom's] perspective and her strong beliefs and how that, you know, moulded her decision making because she did what she thought was right." It was because of her mom's Catholic beliefs that Marie blamed the church for many years for the continuation of the sexual abuse. Marie received very mixed messages when her parents later divorced over drinking and not because of the abuse, as though alcoholism was

acceptable grounds for divorce in the eyes of the church but sexual abuse was not. Marie spoke of having to engage in a significant amount of healing work with her mom in order to repair their relationship.

Marie believed that the Catholic Church did not view child sexual abuse as legitimate grounds for breaking vows of marriage. She also believed that there did not seem to be any recourse or accountability for a man sexually abusing his daughter and his marriage was considered to be more sacred and important to maintain than protecting her, the child. These were the types of beliefs that had Marie doubting her religious upbringing and her commitment to the Catholic faith.

Janet described her mom as “anorexic and um, in a sense, very controlling and somewhat abusive, but I think it was her only way of coping because you know, her life was just so out of control.” Rather than feeling betrayed by her mom for not protecting her, Janet showed compassion and empathy towards her mom:

I think a lot of people wouldn't be able to understand that I wouldn't be upset that mom never protected me, but mom went through her own living hell in our house. And [my sister's] was different than mine, mine was different than [my sister's], and mom's was different than all of our's.

When she finally did disclose the sexual abuse to her mom about 6 months prior to the first research interview, her mom responded with “You know, I always wondered.” Janet was surprised and questioned why her mom had never asked her. Janet's mom replied, “I just never dare ask 'cause I knew I'd never be able to handle the answer.” Hearing her mom's response left Janet with a feeling of relief because it meant to her that if Janet had disclosed at the time of the sexual abuse, somebody would have believed her. In addition to being betrayed by her mom, Janet also experienced betrayal by her aunt and her grandparents. Janet's aunt alluded to knowing that Janet's sister was being abused, and yet did nothing to stop it. Janet's grandparents lived on the same yard as her family and she believed they saw what was happening in Janet's home, yet they also did not intervene.

The betrayal that the women experienced by close adults in their lives who were charged with protecting them but instead perpetrated or allowed the abuse to continue, contributed to the hypocrisy that they experienced. The women confronted this hypocrisy, which led them to

challenge their religious beliefs and depart from the religion of their upbringing. Turning away from their religions significantly impacted the women's spiritual coping.

“Wandering the Wilderness:” Searching

The third invariant “*Wandering the Wilderness:” Searching*, involves *Questioning* and *Exploration*. Prompted by the angst the women experienced regarding their experiences of childhood sexual abuse, the women questioned and doubted the religion of their upbringing. The uncertainty regarding their previous religions led them to examine and explore their beliefs, making it impossible for them to continue on the spiritual paths they had previously been on. The women walked away from the religion of their upbringing, and ultimately went in search of meaning, thus changing, adapting, or modifying their spirituality. At the time of the interviews, it was clear in each case that the journey was not complete and that they were all still “in process,” learning their own truths, and exploring the meaning of their spirituality. Their changing spirituality significantly impacted their spiritual coping behaviours.

Questioning. Directly and indirectly related to their experiences of child sexual abuse were doubts and questions regarding the religion of their upbringing, which caused the women angst. The angst caused friction and was a source of contention within them, culminating in a turning point or crisis in relation to their spirituality, and a disruption to their spiritual coping. This crisis led the women to search for a spirituality, which resonated with them and facilitated their spiritual coping.

Both Janet and Dawn indicated that they had initially had a very strong faith in God. Janet's faith in God when she was a child was so strong that she described herself as being like Billy Graham, while Dawn recalls being very in-tune with God and even starting a revival at 15 years of age. However, Marie realized that she never felt comfortable in the Catholic religion she was brought up in. Although she went to church on a regular basis and was for all intents and purposes practicing the religion by attending mass, catechism, praying to the Hail Mary, fasting, and confessing to a priest, Marie articulated that the repetition and recitation commonly practiced in the Catholic Church did not resonate with her. As soon as Marie was married, she stopped attending church.

It seemed as though Janet did not lose her belief in God along her spiritual journey, but she reached a point where for many years she was not really living for Him, meaning that she was not really obeying his commands or teachings. Janet experienced “the faith of a child” when

she was a child, but then went through a period of doubt and questioning and *disbelief* before returning back to her faith. She painted the picture of her spiritual journey in this way:

I had wandered in the wilderness for 13 years. I know exactly what the Israelites went through. Wandering is the loneliest, saddest place to be without Jesus when you've had Him in your life. And even though I came back to Him, man, I still had a tough road ahead of me. 'Cause there's consequences to our decisions.

Marie and Dawn both had doubts about God and the religion of their upbringing. Marie experienced dissonance between her spirituality and the sexual abuse because she could not understand how the abuse could happen to her, as she was a "creature of God." She revealed that she questioned the whole "God" thing from early on, but believed that there was a greater power of some kind. Likewise, Dawn became open to the fact that God might not be consistently defined in the way that she had been taught by the Pentecostal church, and she became more open minded to alternate spiritual possibilities:

There was also an inkling of me that it wasn't God per se, that there wasn't this – or it wasn't this type of God, right? It was more of an energy. It was more of a flowing. It was more of that because of things that I experienced, so even in that, my view was not as narrow as their view.

This more expansive concept of God occurred because Dawn expressed difficulties with reconciling her previous concept of God. Her perspective was that God permitted the abuse because she perceived that He did nothing to stop it, which compelled her to doubt His existence:

If God *was* real, then how would God endorse this belief [that abuse was tolerable]. I came to a crisis in faith in terms of saying "How can you endorse this [the abuse][Pause] Um, as *God* (laugh). When this [the abuse] is you know, kind of what – what you're endorsing.

Dawn perceived that God had betrayed her, and decided that He was not a God she could respect. No longer able to retain her faith, Dawn grew angry with God and questioned His existence.

Upon questioning God's existence, Dawn eventually came to a place where she was quite fine without having a God and she decided that she did not need a God and no longer believed in a deity. The fact that she perceived the Pentecostals as being so "fear based and judgmental – and it wasn't about love, reinforced that thing of 'is this [religion] the right way? Is this really...you

know if there is a God this certainly is not the God.” She did not believe that if bad things happened to you, it meant that you were not praying enough.

Each of the women experienced angst as a result of the questions and doubts they had regarding the religion of their upbringing. This angst acted as a catalyst, motivating the women to go in search of a new spirituality, which was more congruent for them. Through their changed spirituality, the women discovered alternate ways of spiritual coping, which assisted them in healing from their experiences of childhood sexual abuse.

Exploration. As a result of the doubt and questioning the women experienced regarding the religion of their upbringing, they explored different religions, religious beliefs, or spiritualities. Although Dawn did not claim that the sexual abuse she experienced as a child directly caused her spirituality to change, she did express that it acted as a catalyst, which caused her to move in a different direction spiritually. She was seeking a way to make sense of the world; partly as a result of the pain she was experiencing in relation to working through her abuse, her sexuality, and her past religion.

As Dawn sought a new way to mould God, she began a process that she described as a “journey to biblical feminism and Christian feminism.” She also entered into Catholicism for a period of time while in University. Dawn explained that her exploration of ecumenical beliefs was prompted by the rejection she faced by the religion of her childhood and the perceived incongruence between her religious beliefs and herself. She attributed her spiritual transition to the change she saw in herself and was drawn to spiritualities that were akin to the changes happening within her. She shared:

I did not have a language, a means, a way to define myself. Plus I did not yet know who I was. I did have a real good idea of who I was no longer. I did not have a means to frame self. My old self was no longer me. I did not yet have any supports/people/community that accepted this new and different me. I also would say I did not know how to frame the world around me. It would also be the world around me.

Dawn simultaneously worked through some of her abuse issues as she began to leave the church in search of an alternate spirituality.

In attempt to make sense of her experience of sexual abuse, Marie briefly turned to the satanic bible:

I was trying to find answers as to at that time I was feeling everything was my fault and that I wasn't clean, that I was this evil person. So I was trying to find well, ok I'm not "Godly-like," maybe I'm "satanic-like." And so I was seeking "where do I fit?" kind of thing.

Her exploration of Satanism did not last very long because it scared her. Not only were her Catholic beliefs telling her that she should not be reading the satanic bible, but some of the satanic bible also made sense to her, which caused her more fear. Marie also recalled her mom having a fit when she found the satanic bible in Marie's room.

At various times in her life, Marie examined other religions in a quest for meaning, answers, and a framework for life and living. She was seeking some sort of safety, belonging, and comfort:

Yeah, and I remember looking into East Indian religions, and some Chinese practices because they were so old and because I think I was fascinated because they were long before the Catholic Church and they were a total way of life, you know, not just on Sundays, but they had a whole total way of life to them. So, I wanted to see what was the difference between that and the Catholic Church. Was some of it the same? I've always been curious about religion, so. Or spiritual practices.

However, she always found herself seeking more. Marie found herself reaching a point in which she was not only questioning her spirituality, but also purpose for spirituality in general. She searched for so long and looked into different things, thinking she might find an answer for everything, including whatever was "wrong" with her. As she sought different spiritualities she began to wonder if she was just jumping from one ideology to another, Marie wondered if she was giving each type of spirituality a chance or if she was just so full of doubt that nothing would work. She remembered sitting at the riverbank and contemplating what spirituality was and why she needed it. She questioned whether it was something that everybody needed or if it was just some "fad."

Although Janet did not mention exploring other faiths, she did question her own faith and abandoned it for many years. She understood that it was God's timing that allowed her to journey back to Him after a lengthy departure from Him because she believes that He lets everything happen in His time for His purpose. For whatever reason, which she declared she may not know this side of heaven, the timing was not right in her past to grow close to God. With her

renewed relationship with God, and a strengthened spirituality, Janet was able to begin healing from her sexual abuse. She trusted that if she was truly in God's will, it did not matter when she dealt with the abuse; whether it was recently or earlier in life. She shared, "As long as I'm in God's will, that's exactly where I want to be. Because there is no other place to be than but God's will."

Each of the women moved towards a different spirituality as they simultaneously worked through healing from their sexual abuse. They each recognized that the journey had been long but it was still not complete, as they are still learning about and developing their current spiritualities and subsequently, their spiritual coping methods. Entering into alternate spiritualities from the religions they grew up in facilitated the women's spiritual coping with their child sexual abuse.

"Worm to Butterfly:" Transformation

The fourth invariant "*Worm to Butterfly:*" *Transformation*, includes *Personalization* and *Coping Behaviours*. Within coping behaviours are several different types: *Forgiveness/Letting Go*; *Sweats*; *Prayer*; *Hail Mary*; *Burning Incense/Sage*; *Smudging*; and, *Speaking in Tongues*. An important aspect of each of the women's spiritual coping was the transformation of their spirituality over time. Following the questioning and doubts of the religion of their upbringing which led the women to seek and explore alternate spiritualities, their newly acquired spirituality was transformed into something more personal and resonating for them, and appeared to be more congruent with their beliefs, experiences, and worldviews. Additionally, the alternate spiritualities the women adopted presented different spiritual coping methods, which helped them to cope from their experience of child sexual abuse.

Personalization. The key to the women's new spirituality was that it became very personal for them compared to the religion of their upbringing, which ingrained in them that they were to obey and believe, even though they felt unable to question those beliefs. Both Marie and Dawn felt "indoctrinated" in the past, and so it was very important for them to be able to have control over what their spirituality came to be and personalize it for themselves. They transitioned from obedience and submission in the religion of their upbringing to a transformed spirituality, which provided them with a sense of control and ownership.

Marie considered that one of the reasons she felt so comfortable in her new spirituality was because it was a way of life. Both Marie and Dawn felt that their current spirituality was

personal and accepting of others because they were not “pushy” or “preachy” and there was no expectation or pressure for them to try and convert people. Marie shared: “Aboriginal spirituality isn’t about converting people, and, we, you know we don’t – the people that I know anyway, don’t go out there ‘come on, you gotta come to a sweat!’ Doesn’t go that way.” Dawn agreed that in contrast to her perception of religion, her new spirituality did not require her to convert anyone to her spirituality.

For Dawn, spirituality is much more personal than religion: “spirituality is very much your internal process and what works for you, not about exerting violence or power over somebody else.” Dawn suggested that her spirituality cannot be argued as it is a highly personal and subjective experience compared with religion, which she believes to be debatable, and causes war. She believes that religion is partially about institutions, external rules, formalities, and tenets such as the Nicene Creed for Christians. Dawn declared that her new spirituality has allowed her to realize that “sometimes it’s about reframing or looking at things in a different way,” which she has found to be helpful because it has allowed “things opening up, things becoming bigger, there being more possibilities, there being more opportunities to be more creative.”

Dawn used the metaphor, “worm to butterfly” to describe how she experienced the transformation from the religion of her childhood to her new spirituality. Having gone through a period of not knowing who she was or how to be in the world, she came into a new spirituality, which not only allowed her to be herself, but also accepted and embraced her. Adapting her beliefs about Christianity enabled her to be better able to cope with her sexual abuse: “So, I guess that was a catalyst and a coping – was to...work through and take the parts that fit and to leave the rest out because it no longer fit for me.” Rather than fitting under the rules of her past religion, she formed her own beliefs and consequently, developed a spirituality that fit for her, rather than being forced to fit under a religion. Dawn admitted to maintaining some of her “Christian” values within her new spirituality such as honesty and all things in moderation. While preserving some of her original values, she also broadened and incorporated a combination of other values, beliefs, and teachings to her new spirituality. She incorporated the Buddhist belief of acceptance, curiosity, and story; the Aboriginal idea of being connected; as well as aspects of the Celestine, psychology, fiction, Anne Rice, and Reiki.

Marie claimed that as a result of her childhood sexual abuse, she described having issues with control and wanting to control things in her life for many years. Being able to take control of her own spirituality and personalize it was much more congruent for Marie than submitting to the religion she grew up in which she did not agree with. This personalization brought her freedom:

I think that was the biggest thing. It wasn't "well you read this from a book. Umm, say this. Repeat this. And when a priest says this, you say that. Now (inaudible) on your knees. Now stand up." It wasn't like that. It was so free. Like, you do what you need to do.

Marie was not expected to do things in a certain order, which was meaningful for her because she had the freedom and flexibility to practice her spirituality "whenever I need it, wherever I need to. I don't have to go to a church or...um, I can be anywhere." She shared that her newly acquired spirituality felt natural, like she could openly practice and participate in it:

In a way, maybe it's how some people who are "born again" feel? I don't know. I just felt "Yes! This is 'me'. I feel comfort here, I feel safe. This, I believe in. Not because I'm being told to, but because I wholly believe in it, like you know, my body and spirit," and it just felt "right."

Marie revealed that her exploration of Aboriginal spirituality truly happened when she moved up north, as it was a symbolic place for her and she described feeling safe and serene; able to engage in healing work related to her abuse. She explained that it was there that she was really humbled and became grounded in her spirituality. Marie reflected that the whole time she worked with the elder up North, the elder was always teaching and encouraging Marie to personalize her spirituality by using the things that worked for her and to leave the other things behind: "What good things can you take? Leave the bad there. It's not for you to carry. You've carried it long enough. What good things can you take? What strength can you take from that?" The elder was not only willing but encouraged Marie to do the healing work in her own way, in her own time. Marie never once perceived the elder to be invasive, but understood her to be gentle and guiding, leaving most of the healing work up to Marie.

Marie discussed the all-encompassing nature of her Aboriginal spirituality in respect to being able to live in dissonance, by accepting both the "good" and the "bad." She remarked that

her current spirituality has helped her to cope by enabling her to navigate her past, carrying forward only what is useful for the present:

the form of spirituality I practice, uh... brings in even pain from the past but also as a teaching tool for myself in recognizing you know, maybe, um, “you’re not that person anymore” and celebrating how much you’ve grown and you’ve been open to grow. And that ability to recognize that [pain] in other people who maybe can’t verbally share it, but they tell their story in their behaviour.

Embracing her Aboriginal spirituality became a vital part of Marie’s experience of spiritual coping from her childhood sexual abuse. It was necessary in order for healing to occur, for Marie to feel “whole” again, and for resiliency to be fostered. As she illustrates “I think the other thing with the spirituality is that [pause] once you’ve been sexually abused, there’s a part of your spirit – and this is my belief – there’s a part of your spirit that either crumbles, or get’s stronger.” As opposed to the religion she grew up in, Marie believes that the spirituality she practices now fosters and celebrates the spirit and resiliency within people:

And, I mean, you can see the walking wounded on a daily basis, and you know without even asking where some of that [hurt and pain] comes from. But it always has amazed me, even aside from my own experiences, it always amazes me how strong the human spirit is, and what it can take and still have that desire, that hope, that belief, that purpose, you know, it – it just amazes me. You know, and yeah, so...the church doesn’t celebrate that.

Marie previously experienced complete shame about her sexual abuse, but now feels a sense of pride at her resilience. Her Aboriginal spirituality has taught her:

to celebrate who you are, and the knowledge you do have, and the fact that you survived and that you carry that wisdom, And I mean, there’s wisdom that I didn’t even know I had but now I recognize. There’s you know, things I’m in tune in my environment due to that [Aboriginal spirituality].

While Dawn and Marie both experienced harmony in their new spirituality by being in control of it and making it personal for themselves, gaining control over her spirituality was experienced very differently by Janet. With the loss of control she experienced as a result of her child sexual abuse, she tried for years to maintain a level of perfection and a semblance of control in other areas of her life. She was envious of others who appeared to have everything

“together” because she always felt as though she could not get “it” together. Janet discovered that ironically, the only real way for her to be in control was to relinquish all control to God and recognize that He is ultimately in control. Coming to this conclusion led to a stronger, more personal relationship with God, which eventually changed her spiritually. Janet describes her current spirituality as being her “daily walk with God. When no one sees me.” She insists that:

The only thing that makes me spiritual is what God has done for me and my walk with him, ‘cause it’s nothing that I can do because I still, as long as I live on this earth, will have struggles. And...yeah. So, spirituality is my walk today with Jesus my Lord.

Her belief in God’s graciousness and generosity to her, giving Christ so unconditionally is not only incredibly freeing for Janet, but she described it as enabling her journey back to God to be stronger and deeper than she ever dreamt it could be. Janet believed that God caused her to grow in ways she never thought possible and she is thankful to God that He is in control and has orchestrated her steps. Janet believes that by sending the message to others that if they would allow God to take care of them the way He has taken care of her, then her experience will not be in vain. Janet believes that if other survivors rely on God for strength and support, they will be able to cope with and heal from their experience of child sexual abuse.

By having a sense of control over their spirituality, the women were able to personalize and own their new beliefs. The women appeared more comfortable and confident after discovering spiritualities, which were more meaningful to them. They expressed having new understanding, and perspectives, and an expanded sense of possibility in their lives. It seemed as though there were more possibilities available to the women through their changed spirituality.

Coping Behaviours. Behaviours are an integral part of spiritual coping, and these women engaged in various rituals, practices, ceremonies, and traditions, which facilitated their spiritual coping. Specific spiritual actions or rituals assisted in moving these women along their journeys in helping them to shape their own understandings of their individualized spirituality. Although Dawn believed that rituals can be either part of a spiritual or religious experience, the difference is that the spiritual experience is personal. Prior to coming into their new spirituality, the women engaged in a variety of coping behaviours.

Janet described avoiding the sexual abuse by burying it, which she considered to be her primary way of coping. She also mentioned developing obsessive-compulsive behaviours as she

poured herself 200% into everything that she did. She provided an analogy to describe the way in which she also previously used humour to cope:

remember those clowns that they used to have and they would bring out that long scarf [pulling an imaginary scarf out of her mouth] and it would be red and then green and then yellow and then purple and as I dealt with all of that [sexual abuse], um, I just felt like one of those clowns because I had always been the clown in the family. When I knew that my mom or my sister was gonna get it [abuse], I came in with a funny and sometimes I could completely deviate dad and get him off his track of thought and sometimes it didn't work. But my sister always said that when I laughed the hardest and the most, she knew that I was probably hurting the worst. And so for me, humour has always been a way to cover up what I really felt.

Janet also referred to the judgmental attitude she sustained, which appeared to be another method of coping for her as she built walls up around herself as a means of self-protection. It was not until she started the journey of healing from her sexual abuse and came into her new spirituality that her judgmental attitudes softened. She felt that God had given her compassion and just really dealt with her, "with my heart and my feelings, my judgmental attitudes, and I think once, once those things started to heal, then God was able to heal all the other stuff."

Until her spirituality became central to her coping, Dawn engaged in drinking, cutting, suicide attempts, and acting out. She described feeling angry and stated: "I wouldn't say I *dealt* with [the sexual abuse] – I guess there were some negative things [coping behaviours] going on, but I wouldn't say there was a lot of positive coping." Marie experienced a similar pattern of coping. Marie's perception of her self over the course of the abuse was that she was "probably the least spiritual person alive. In my mind, at that time. I was drinking, I was drugging, I was having sex, I was never home, I was a rebel teenager...and like, God – church, and God all that was the last thing on my mind." When Marie was in the midst of her abuse and was in a religion which caused confusion and angst for her, she engaged in self-harming behaviours such as self-cutting, suicide attempts, abundant sex, drinking, and drugs. She also rebelled, acted out, ran away, and skipped school. However, there were also some healthier coping behaviours that she practiced such as reading and listening to, writing, and playing music.

Marie's current spirituality has impacted her healing from the sexual abuse by teaching her "healthier ways of coping. I mean then, that's what I did to cope and survive during those

times, you know, the drugs and the sex and all of that stuff, but this [Aboriginal spiritual practice] is healthier tools.” Further, each of the women discovered healthier spiritual coping methods through their new spiritualities, although some of these coping methods were instilled in the religion of their pasts.

Forgiveness/Letting Go. Janet identified forgiveness as being the “crux of spirituality,” and just as she receives constant forgiveness, “Jesus keeps forgiving me and pouring it out and pouring it out,” she must also chose to forgive “It doesn’t matter what I do, unless I harbour huge unforgiveness in my heart, cause it says ‘If you will not forgive, God will not forgive you.’ And I take that very seriously.” For her, forgiveness is a choice with multiple aspects. Forgiveness is lifelong, continual, and should be unconditional:

because of my walk with Jesus, I know that my forgiveness with dad, absolutely, totally, has to be unconditional. As is my forgiveness from God. To me, um, and the type of person that I am – which does not sit well in a church setting – there is no grey. It is black, or it is white. And so, for me to forgive, um, dad today, and then have a dream about him tonight and then be angry at him tomorrow, cannot be. If I am where I say I am. And, one thing I am not, is a hypocrite. So, if I tell ya I’ve forgiven him, it’s 100%. Janet indicated that she has forgiven her father for everything.

Although she has been able to forgive, Marie has only had forgiveness for her mom and not for her father. Marie explained that part of the reason she was able to forgive her mom was because her mom took responsibility and ownership for the choices that she made during the time that Marie was being sexually abused. Marie was invited by her mom to go to an Alanon meeting she was speaking at. In her talk, Marie’s mom stated that she had chosen to ignore or deny the abuse that was going on in her home because she did not know what else to do. It was following that that Marie became closer than ever to her mom.

Marie shared that her spirituality made it easier to deal with the sexual abuse in the sense that she was able to “let go” instead of carrying around her anger. She believed that there is a significant difference between “forgiveness” and “letting go.”

But, I still have issues around that ‘forgiveness’ stuff. Um...and so, for me, letting go is different than forgiving. And in some ways I can honestly say I do forgive, but in other ways I can’t. I can’t honestly say that I forgive him [her dad] for everything he did [abuse]. And part of, part of it for me is that when I look back on, on the grooming and

all of that, there was intent. And so if it was a one-time thing and none of the rest of the factors were there, then I can forgive that, but. And the fact that, in his own subtle way, he could have apologized and he chose not to. So, there was an ownership. So I feel that I can't forgive when the other person can't take ownership either. And I also can't forgive how that impacted my life. Not just my life, my kids' too.

Through differentiating and distinguishing between forgiveness and letting go, Marie has been able to come to terms with the ability to simply "let go" in relation to her dad because that is all that is within her power and control to be able to do. Letting go for her means to let go of what she owns. One way in which letting go was easier for Marie was to learn of her father's family history because it gave her a different level of understanding of where his abuse history came from.

Marie took part in a ceremony around grieving and letting go, which was meant to be an exercise in forgiveness:

what we did was – it wasn't even, it was a combination of things. It wasn't even strictly an aboriginal ceremony. We had um, four medicines: sweet grass, sage, cedar, and tobacco, and uh, had prayer. But then I wrote a letter to him telling how I felt, and it was long, it was many pages. And we burnt it with sacred medicine. And, uh, I just granted his spirit to be free and uh, then I prayed that the things that I loved and cherished about him I would carry, and the things that were the other person...that I let go of that – it is no longer my need to carry it anymore. And so in a way, I mean, it helped me let go of that.

Although Dawn spoke of forgiveness, she was unable to forgive her father. She shared, "So I would be asked to not be angry at him and forgive him and I didn't want to at that point, forgive him. Um, because I was angry at him for a lot of things." She did not reveal whether or not she has since been able to forgive.

Sweats. Marie described ceremony as being a part of her spirituality, and the First Nations ceremony known as "Sweats" is a way in which Marie has been able to "let go." When she moved up north, Marie attended a couple of sweats with an elder, "the second one that I went to was specifically around abuse. Not just the abuse from [my partner], but my sexual abuse, all of that dirt. Ick." The elder explained to her that she needed to cleanse before going back to her house:

When she took me to the sweat before I went back into the house, I needed to cleanse from that you know, ‘bad emotions’ and ‘anger’ and all of those things. And that was positive going into the house. [My partner] would have no choice but to be around that energy. You know, that’s how she explained it right?

Marie experienced “sweats” as being “both physical and spiritual cleansing.” She shared, “I remember the first time I had done the whole sweat thing, I mean you’re physically drained. But, you feel so strong inside and healthy. You know, just, oh, so exhausted, but it’s a good exhausted.” Marie viewed sweats as being a symbolic form of letting go, a “releasing,” and a sort of “washing the dirt” which allowed her to just purge and let go:

I was in the bush doing, doing this cleanse. And, and I just can’t express how it was just like a weight lifted off me – it was like I could see mud shedding from me. It was, it was just so “ahhhhh.” And I was so submitted to it, it was like “Yessss! Let go of this shit.”

Not only did she experience the sweats as a symbolic form of letting go, she also experienced a literal letting go as well, which helped her cope with her sexual abuse.

Prayer. Prayer is an important part of spiritual coping for Janet. She describes it as simply a command from the bible: “Love those who hurt you. Pray for those who despise you.” Janet has also viewed prayer as a spiritual coping method which helped her to survive her experience of child sexual abuse: “to say ‘God help me’, like, in that time and to know that your prayer went into a bowl, and that God is hearing, that He is listening, and that He is seeing every minute detail.” Through her prayer, Janet believes that God gives her pictures or visions which give her hope but which also enable her to continually forgive. One of her pictures involves her dad at a young age, which helps her to identify with the little boy that he was at the time of his own abuse:

when I get pictures, I just go back to the picture of ‘soft skin and fly away hair’ and I picture – I just, I have no idea if the picture in my head is what dad looked like when he was ten, but when something rises up inside me again, I go back to that picture, and just say “It’s ok. It’s done. It’s dealt with, it’s done.” Because it is. And it has to be because not to forgive whole-heartedly, doesn’t honour him [my father].

For Marie, her new spirituality allowed her the flexibility and control to be able to pray however and wherever she chose: “if I want to celebrate a tree because it provides life and has a purpose, then that’s what I’m going to pray to that day.” She declared that she is able to go in the

bush and pray, she can pray in her chair in her office, and she can smudge anywhere she wants to. She felt free to “look out and see you know, creation, and be grateful, and see the water and know that that was created for purpose.” She described her prayer as being flexible and unstructured:

There is no structure and I mean, I can pray while I am sitting on the bus. I can, you know, say thank you for a beautiful sunset whenever I want. Not that other religions don't do that, but I'm more conscience of it now. I never ever did those things before when I went to church. You know, I always prayed for my family's health, and that kind of thing, but I don't remember any prayers in Catholic Church where it was thanking for clean air to breathe and water to drink. So for me, it [prayer] is simplistic and probably because I was raised in a very rigid “this is how it goes and don't you *dare* do *that* before you do *this*,” and this isn't like that.

Marie explained that she felt more honest, genuine, and conscious of what she was praying about instead of just reciting prayer that she had been taught growing up. She said “for once in my life I learned how to pray from my heart.” Prayer meant giving thanks to the creator for all that she's been given.

Hail Mary. Although she is no longer a practicing Catholic, Marie described reverting back to some of her Catholic traditions including praying to Mary. She shared, “There's still times when I will say a ‘Hail Mary’, it just comes in my head, you know, someone's been in an accident or particularly if my mom's sick or someone that I know is Catholic. I just say a ‘Hail Mary’.” Marie described this occasional tendency to utilize practices from her previous religion as being natural and comfortable.

Burning Incense/Sage. Dawn distinguished the difference she saw between religion and spirituality with the former being about institutions, tenets, external rules, and formal practices, and the latter involving personal, internal experience. She believed that ritual could be either a spiritual or a religious experience as there is some overlap for both, and this may involve burning incense or sage. However, she emphasizes that for her, spirituality is a personal experience.

Smudging. Marie talked about being introduced to smudging for the first time “shortly after I got married, my dad's sister moved to this small town where I lived, and she secretly introduced me to the aboriginal smudging, and prayer. And I loved it. Yup, from the first time.” She initially felt conflicted about smudging as it went against her Catholic teachings and in a

sense betrayed her mother and her mother's beliefs. However, Marie learned to accept and embrace smudging as her own. She smudges as a way of cleansing her own as well as the bad energy of people around her, while simultaneously praying for strength and guidance. Marie described smudging as being another way for her to grieve and to let go.

Speaking in Tongues. As Dawn's spirituality moved out of a "religious belief," she recognized fragments from her Pentecostal experience, which she could not rationally explain and therefore had to integrate into her new beliefs. One of these was her ability to speak in tongues. Dawn described this ability as being perceived by Pentecostals as a gift from God. In the Pentecostal church, she explained that speaking in tongues was seen as a "down payment on your salvation." However, having moved out of the church, she understands her ability to speak in tongues as part of her heritage, which she does not understand. She no longer frames speaking in tongues as a gift from God, but indicated that if it turned out that if it were, she would deal with that. She explained: "Speaking in tongues, it does no harm. Not sure what it is but it harms no one. At worst it is neutral. Speaking in tongues will be a comfort if I happen across any possessed people." Dawn had experienced an interaction when she was 15 with a man who was "possessed" and she spoke in tongues without even thinking about it. She described knowing where the possessed individual was even when he was being exorcised. She believed that having that knowledge and awareness of his whereabouts was spiritually protective.

Each of the women's spirituality underwent change and transformation and became highly personal for them. Janet believes that the crux of her spirituality is forgiveness, while Marie felt that the most important thing about her spirituality is connection. Dawn required that her new spirituality encompasses openness and acceptance. Through their newfound spirituality, the women were able to find coping behaviours and methods of spiritual coping that resonated for them.

"Bringing Me to Shore:" Support

The last invariant "*Brining Me to Shore:*" *Support*, consists of *Connection/Relationship* and *Acceptance*. With their newfound spirituality, the women each discovered a way to accept and connect with themselves, others, and their surroundings, thus establishing relationship and support. Further, the connections, relationships, and acceptance that they acquired facilitated the women's spiritual coping with their experiences of childhood sexual abuse. The support systems varied widely for each of the women, but were an important part of their experience.

Connection/Relationship. According to the women, the connections and relationships that they made following their changed spiritualities served as a means of spiritual coping. Following her transition into her new spirituality, Dawn determined that she was capable of connecting with other people, which is a central element of her current spirituality. Dawn explained that a combination of her sexual abuse experience, the religion of her upbringing, and her sexuality caused her to previously feel isolated from herself and others. However, she feels that her current spirituality has allowed her to feel connected:

Now my spirituality, the pieces about being part of the universe, about how if I harm you, I harm myself too. I am connected to everything. . . . My friends, my family, people as a whole, acquaintances. All things are connected.

Dawn described how connecting with others helped her cope with the pain of her childhood sexual abuse: “Through letting people connect with me. By finding a community of friends, places where I felt like I could be.” In order to connect with others, Dawn recognized that it is important to be present, genuine, and honest with people. She shared, “honesty’s really important to be real. And to be genuine, ‘cause it’s only in that [genuineness] there’s sort of ‘connectedness’.”

For Marie, her new spirituality gave her “the ability to reach out for support.” During her time up north, Marie found herself in a battered women’s shelter after a particularly violent assault at the hands of her husband. Marie believed that she was likely at her lowest point as far as her self-esteem and self-worth were concerned. She shared the physical and emotional impact that the assault had on her. Marie stated she was “black and blue from head to toe on the outside, but I was on the inside too.” It was at this point that she decided that she needed help to cope, survive, and heal from the impacts of her sexual abuse, and this was made possible by reaching out for support.

Marie believed that she was welcomed by the elders as she entered the community up north and shared, “they opened their arms to me,” and “they were open to teaching me and guiding me” without looking down on her or judging her. Marie indicated that her primary support came from a particular elder who had helped her enter the shelter after the assault: “it was amazing because it was an elder [that I turned to for support] – I was just starting to get to know her as an elder. And, she was the only person I knew to go to.” Marie talked about having little support in her life and very few people that she trusted: “the thing that I think amazed me

the most was I didn't trust anyone. About anything. And for whatever reason, that elder that I connected with – I trusted her with my life.” Although she was typically unable to trust people, Marie contemplated whether the reason she trusted the elder was because of the way in which the elder worked with her. As previously indicated, Marie shared that the elder gave her all the control to be able to work through her healing. The other thing that assisted Marie in trusting the elder was that they both had similar experiences and the elder often used humour in their interactions as well.

Marie articulated that the Aboriginal spirituality that she practices now makes sense to her and connects her to her surroundings, and that this connection inspired her to view things differently. She had never considered herself to be a “mother nature person” before and still does not really see herself as such, but she no longer sees the scenery with her eyes alone now; she sees it, and feels connected to the beautiful scenery, believing it was created for a purpose. She shared, “Everything is connected with the water, earth, with the sky air, the basic essentials we all need that doesn't matter where we live...and I never looked at things that way before.” In addition to connecting her with the universe, Marie felt that her Aboriginal spirituality also connected her to a higher power and with others. Further, through support, Marie was able to reconnect with herself, connecting her feelings and thoughts, particularly around the abuse. She described learning more about herself and developing more confidence in her abilities.

Janet's church life enabled her to cope with her childhood sexual abuse as it provided her with an escape from home as well as relationship and a sense of connection:

And you have that distinct relationship with the church, with Sunday school teachers, with choir teachers, you know, you're involved in vacation bible school and there's just so many things that take you out of that home scene, um, and those things help you survive. Those things help you cope. Cause you are gone and you're out of the craziness [of home] and you're into some kind of normal.

Church provided her with some protection, stability, and normalcy in an otherwise chaotic childhood. Janet stated that her dad's reaction to her and her sister's church attendance was negative and he would say, “oh you're not going to those ‘damn holy rollers’ again.” She described that “Almost every time we [my sister and I] went to church it was an actual, physical fight [with dad] going out the door,” but that the fight “was so worth it because of what we had

to go to.” This really illuminated the dichotomy of her two worlds, as she believed she was safer with her church family than she was with her own biological family.

Janet described a variety of individuals who were significant supports to her at specific times. When she was a little girl, Janet recalled neighbours who had faithfully taken her and her sister to church every Sunday because Janet’s dad “was a professing atheist and mom wasn’t living for the Lord,” and therefore, were not attending church. Janet believed that this couple must have sensed that the girls’ home life was not good and that this was a way that they could support her and her sister.

Janet found that the one person who was a constant for her throughout her life was her older sister: “my sister was, in all honesty, my sister’s the most amazing person that God ever put on the face of the earth.” Janet recalled a conversation in which she was feeling guilty about how minimal she perceived her abuse to be compared with the horrific abuse her sister had experienced. Her sister was unaware of any of the abuse that Janet was experiencing at the time. When Janet asked her sister how she could even talk to her, her sister was in shock and responded by saying: “Don’t you dare say that.” Her sister went on to say:

From the time I knew that mom was going to have a baby . . . I prayed for that baby every night . . . you know, and I got it [the abuse] and you didn’t. And I went to bed and I said, “Thank you Jesus. Thank you for your goodness to this baby.”

Janet was astonished by the type of love and support her sister provided her: “There’s an epitome of God’s love in [my sister]. . . I know we’re supposed to want to be like Jesus, but when people say ‘Who do you want to be like?’ [My sister]. She’s *amazing*.”

After Janet walked away from God and the church for a period of time, there were several different people in her life that encouraged her to return to God. Three individuals approached Janet with a similar message: “Janet come back to the Lord, because if you don’t you’re in for nothing but heartache and sorrow.” Janet recalled, “God gave me three warnings and I continued on my path.” It was several years later before she had anyone approach her again about returning to the church and to God. She received a phone call from her uncle, who pleaded with her to make her relationship right with God. It was following this last plea that Janet returned to the church, although it was many years before she truly made her way back to God.

Janet talked about being thankful to God for the people He put in her life to help her work through the sexual abuse she had experienced as a child. She mentioned the doctor that made it

safe for her to finally disclose her sexual abuse as well as her husband who: “has been a huge part of this journey.” She also turned to a couple in her community whom she called “amazing people of God” that helped guide her through the process of healing from her sexual abuse. It was through these people that Janet was shown unconditional love and began to see God as a loving God. She shared, “*they* showed me what God’s unconditional love is all about. . . . and that was the *first* time that I saw God as a loving God. ‘Cause I always saw him as someone with the hammer to come down.” This transformed her perspective of God and spirituality, allowing her a renewed sense of faith. She was finally able to trust God and have faith in His ability to guide and support her. She shared, “God has just been so faithful” and “God has just walked every step of it with us.” Janet saw God as a lifeline for her:

I picture it as like: Christian, non-Christian, side by side in the water and bobbing up and down and you know, being swallowed by a wave and coming up and gasping for air. But you know what, when you deal with it, the Christian just finally gets to shore and can breathe, but the person who doesn’t have Jesus is always being swallowed by the wave because life just brings waves.

Janet described God’s loyalty to her even though she turned her back on Him:

never did he say: “Well, look at that little brat down there. Look how I have guarded her life. Look how, you know, I have brought [her neighbours] into her life and they take her – took her to church 3 times a week. Look at everything those people did that I brought into her life and look at what she’s doing to me now.” He never did that.

Janet experienced connection through relationship. As her spirituality changed and grew, she strengthened her relationship with God. Janet uses marriage as an analogy to her relationship with God. She explains that it is in the difficult times that relationships are tested and ultimately strengthened and nurtured:

Marriage is like a job you work at it absolutely every day, on that marriage. And you get through the tough times and I compare it to agriculture. You know, if it rains all the time, it’s just great, great, great, the roots are on top. But it’s when the tough times come that those roots go down and they go so deep and they draw water from down below and that’s the way it is with God. You know, we can go to church on Sunday and we can sing, and we can worship, and we can raise our hands, and everything’s just wonderful [pause] superficial. It’s in the times when these things are happening: when your health is failing,

um, when your mom...when you watch your mom take her very last breath, those are the times that the roots go so deep.

Through her strengthened relationship with God, she not only experienced support and connection, but she also experienced compassion and protection.

Janet contemplated whether she would have even realized the strength and power that she has in the name of Jesus and in her spiritual relationship if not for participating in something such as the present research, which caused her to reflect on her experience. Participating in the present research made her realize and think about the times that God protected and intervened at the time of the abuse: “you go back. . . and you look at the times that God protected. You know, the times that someone just drove into the driveway, the times that the phone just rang.” Awareness of what she believed to be His protection has brought Janet incredible peace, which has meant everything to her. She described feeling that the only way she has been able to survive is by allowing God to take care of her.

Each of the women found themselves needing to reach out for and accept support from others as a result of their child sexual abuse. Unfortunately, they reached a point in which they felt unable to do so through the religion of their upbringing. Therefore, their current spirituality allowed them to ask and receive help from others, which allowed them to enter into relationship and find connection. It was ultimately through these supports that the women were able to find acceptance.

Acceptance. The support, connection, and relationship that the women gained allowed them to learn acceptance for themselves, from others, and for others. As previously mentioned, being up north and exploring Aboriginal spirituality helped Marie feel grounded and she indicated: “for the first time in my life I felt safe. I felt ok about being me and starting to like myself. And trust my decisions.” She reflected, that in the past, her dad and her family had always denied her cultural identity of being Métis. She shared that by admitting she was Métis, she would have been labeled as a “half-breed.” However, the rest of her father’s family is now open about their Métis heritage; this has helped her to accept herself and has been reinforced by the acceptance she has felt from others.

Dawn shared that the Buddhist belief of acceptance is an important aspect of her spirituality. She contrasted her new spirituality with her previous religion in that her new spirituality enabled her to find self-acceptance and believe in a core sense of herself: “I found a

way to be with myself. Where it was calmer, where I did not feel like I needed to be someone else. Where it was safe and accepting to be whoever. Where it was okay to feel whatever.” Dawn discovered a spirituality, which she believed recognized humans as being basically positive, fostered self-worth, embraced acceptance, and allowed her to “be in the world.” She acknowledged that she had previously been “in between worlds.” The first thing she found to be helpful and facilitate her coping was allowing herself space to “not know.” She had to find the “gray” area; the space in between “black and white.” She had to learn to “find” herself, and she had to figure out how to accept being in a new place:

And so, for me to move through that, things had to be [pause] bigger. They had to be less “black and white,” which was the spirituality and religion of my growing up. That did not fit anymore. [Pause] So I think the coping was finding something that was in between, rather than ‘black’ or ‘white’. It was allowing me space to not know and to be in a space that was in between. And I, in some sense said: “It’s ok to not know and to be fucked up” to some degree.

After experiencing some very low, dark places inside herself, she had developed what she referred to as a “garbage self.” Dawn described her “garbage self” as a place “where I stockpiled all the negative, icky feelings.” However, her thinking changed following her transformed spirituality and she shared, “I started to love and accept her [garbage self], had conversations with her. I started to hope, have better days.” This is a way in which Dawn learned to accept herself.

Dawn reflected that acquiring her newfound spirituality also allowed her to accept her thoughts and feelings without passing judgment, which meant that she no longer had to suppress or deny them as she did in her previous religion. Rather, it was okay for her to have those feelings and to be able to stay with them and move through them. It meant that the thoughts and feelings in and of themselves were not “bad” or that she was going to lose control for having them. Dawn admitted to becoming less judgmental, to accepting her emotions, and to coping with her sexual abuse by “accepting whatever’s there. . . whatever is absent or present. You know, that everything happens and appears and don’t judge it.”

Prior to gaining self-acceptance through her spirituality, Dawn expressed that “it was about being in pain and trying to survive the pain, the aloneness.” Dawn was able to reframe her experience of sexual abuse by “accepting what actually was, rather than what I was told, or

rather what I was taught to believe or told to believe.” As such, she no longer placed judgment, blame, or fault on herself for the sexual abuse. Dawn shared that her spirituality has motivated her to positively reframe negative life experiences: “I think of late the universe provides opportunities sometimes through pain and upheaval. I seem to often change for the better through painful experiences.”

As an extension of being able to accept herself and her emotions or whatever else was present, her altered spirituality also obligated her to accept others:

“I’m human, and you’re human” and that you know, we’re on this “journey;” you have your journey, and I have my journey. But, to be helpful or um, whatever, in terms of getting at that you’re another human being on this, and certainly to as much as possible, I guess, for me, to foster goodwill. Meaning, for me to um...I guess, sort of, help when I can and not harm etcetera, um, even though I get that it’s your journey...um...so it would be partly about “connectedness”...um, partly about acceptance.

Dawn explained that prior to coming into her new spirituality, she found connecting with people to be scary because of the rejection she had faced in her previous religious experience. However, she needed to find supportive people who would accept her the way she was and that were outside of her church and the religion of her upbringing. Dawn shared, “So, I guess how I coped was then to form a different sort of social support from my Pentecostal. Uh, people that accepted where I was at and who I was, so different form of community” because she thought that the people in her church would judge her. “So my coping, I guess was to find some supports that weren’t my former supports and finding the space to be, to be me.” In this new spirituality, Dawn learned to be present for herself and to allow others to be present for her.

One of the significant changes Janet experienced as a result of her new spirituality is the change in her self-perception. She realized that she was not “dirty” and was finally able to accept herself. She stated that:

it doesn’t matter now what anybody says, I know that I am clean and I have nothing, um, I have nothing to be ashamed of. I really don’t. And that is so freeing too. And isn’t that [healing] what that’s all about: is being free? From, from it all. Cause if you’re gonna deal with it, heaven forbid that you would still get swept by those waves. Or then that dealing with it’s been all in vain.

A major contributing factor to her self-acceptance was the love and acceptance she received from God. Janet shared:

God loves Janet the way she is. Um, does He still have lots of work to do on her? You bet. But, knowing that I had a God that would accept me unconditionally and didn't see me as dirty through all of this was just – again, how do people who don't know Jesus, how do they ever get through this? I can't fathom it.

Knowing that God was not judging her, “sitting there with that hammer ‘Well if you'd read your bible five minutes more everyday’ [then the abuse would not have happened to you],” made it easier for Janet to deal with her sexual abuse. Janet attributed her coping during the abuse to her relationship with Jesus. She believed that if she had not known about Jesus' existence at such a tender, tiny age, and that He loved her more than anything, she would not have survived. As a child, she described Jesus as her protector and daddy. Even as she journeyed, Janet believed that God took care of her, and that the only thing that got her through was His unconditional love. Janet stated that she could not imagine how anyone, especially herself, could have survived from and coped with the sexual abuse without the Lord.

The women each spoke about how their changing spirituality enabled them to be able to ask for and accept help and support from others. They described becoming and feeling more connected. This led them to become involved in relationships with others and to experience a connection not only with others, but also with self, a higher power, and their surroundings. In addition to being more connected, they learned to accept themselves as well as others, and to experience acceptance from others, which led to greater connection. This acceptance became an aspect of their healing and spiritual coping with child sexual abuse.

Essential Structure

The invariant aspects of meaning cohere and coalesce to reveal the unified and essential structure of the experience of spiritual coping among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The essential structure consists of the converging of invariants, however, the description of the essential structure does not simply repeat and combine the invariants (Laird, 2008). Instead, the invariants will be integrated into the structure, and stated either implicitly or explicitly into the final description (Laird 2008). In other words, the invariants are like pieces of a puzzle; there is a relationship between the pieces and each one is necessary in order to fit together to reveal the bigger picture, the essential structure. On their own, the pieces are unique

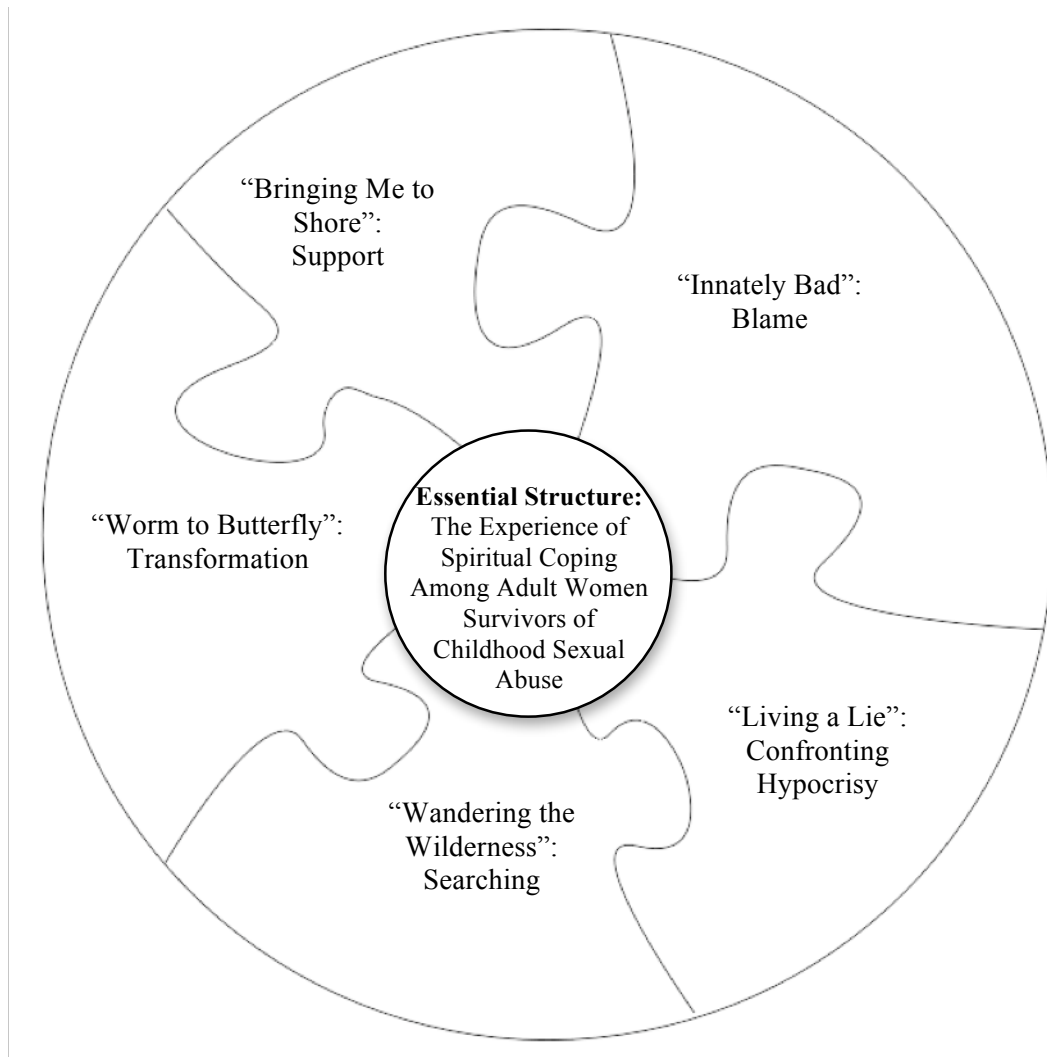
but reveal little about the whole picture, the phenomenon. In other words, “there exists an essential interrelationship among these invariants and . . . they are experienced by the [women] as part of a coherent unity of experience” (Laird, 2008, p. 153). Figure 4 – 2 depicts this interrelationship.

The essential structure illuminates the entirety of the experience in the same way that the convergence of the invariants illuminates the essential structure (Laird, 2008). However, Langdridge (2007) emphasized that the essential structure is depicted in a more general, more abstract way. This final description is considered to be the essential meaning of the experience of spiritual coping among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse and may form the basis for further discussion for those who are interested in this phenomena.

The following is the description of the essential structure of the experience of spiritual coping of women survivors of childhood sexual abuse: As I reflected on the women’s experiences, there emerged an essence from the women’s stories. It occurred to me that each of the women made a decision, conscious or not, to challenge the beliefs and teachings of their religious upbringing. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience a violation of their personal sense of control including their intimate selves. For these women, one way of regaining that control was through their spirituality, which is also very intimate and personal. The women perceived a dissonance between what they were taught to believe, what they were subjected to, and their lived experience, which influenced the women to seek a different spirituality from that of their upbringing. The hypocrisy that the women were exposed to within the religion of their upbringing resulted in a sense of betrayal and mistrust. Self-blame in relation to childhood sexual abuse is common, and these women were no exception. The self-blame and blame they perceived from others challenged their spiritual coping and they were faced with having to overcome both. Subsequently, the combination of blame and hypocrisy created angst for the women, which sent them on an alternative spiritual trajectory as their beliefs were shaken and challenged. The sexual abuse that the women experienced acted as a catalyst for confronting these beliefs as it created angst, which contributed to doubt and questioning of their religious beliefs. One variable that contributed to the women’s questioning was their father’s responsibility for their sexual abuse. The women’s fathers perpetrated the abuse against them and therefore influenced their doubts about their religious faith, compelling them to explore alternatives to their beliefs. All three women turned from the religion they were raised in as a result of their relationship to their

abusers, doubts of their religious upbringing, and questions of their faith. These variables of doubt, questioning, confrontation, and exploration enabled the women to take ownership of their spirituality. Consequently, through exploration of different spiritualities, the women determined and then controlled what their spiritual beliefs were. Although the outcomes of their journeys were very different, each woman reclaimed her spirituality. This reclamation allowed them to reframe their thoughts and beliefs around their sexual abuse. Each woman gained support, acceptance, connection, and relationships through their changed spirituality. They also adopted different behaviours for coping with and surviving from their sexual abuse. The overall impact of having control over, and being able to personalize their spirituality in a way that was more congruent for them, enabled the women's spiritual coping to be effective and lessen the negative impact of their childhood sexual abuse on their lives.

Figure 4 – 2 Coherent Unity of the Experience of Spiritual Coping Among Adult Women
Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse



CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to explore the experience of spiritual coping among adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Spiritual coping is “the use of spiritual beliefs or behaviours to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances” (Koenig et al., 1998, p. 513). Spiritual coping has been studied in general areas of health looking at how this particular coping impacts mental and physical health, psychological functioning, and adjustment to stressful life events. However, very few studies have examined the multi-faceted nature and impact of spiritual coping in relation to CSA (Gall, 2006; Houg, 2008; Murray-Swank & Pargament, 2005; Nkongho, 2006).

It has been suggested that spiritual coping can be either effective or ineffective, and can subsequently play a supportive or detrimental role in individual adjustment. According to Pargament, Smith, et al. (1998), positive spiritual coping methods are “an expression of a sense of spirituality, a secure relationship with God, a belief that there is meaning to be found in life, and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others” (p. 712). Contrarily, negative spiritual coping patterns are “an expression of a less secure relationship with God, a tenuous and ominous view of the world, and a religious struggle in the search for significance” (p. 712).

As research has suggested the importance of spiritual coping, an empirical phenomenological investigation was conducted; three women were interviewed in order to answer the primary research question: “What is the essence of spiritual coping among adult women survivors of childhood sexual abuse?” The intention of the current investigation was to provide rich descriptions of firsthand experiences of women survivors of CSA who personally identified with the experience of spiritual coping in relation to their CSA. From these descriptions emerged an essential structure of the phenomenon, which adds to the growing body of literature regarding spiritual coping among women survivors of CSA.

The following chapter discusses the results of the current empirical phenomenological study and integrate the findings with relevant literature. The invariants as well as an essential structure that emerged from the data are discussed. The strengths and limitations of the research are examined followed by the considerations for future research and mental health professionals. An excerpt from my research journal concludes this chapter.

Discussion of the Invariants and Essential Structure

From the women's discussions the following five invariants emerged: *"Innately Bad:" Blame and Responsibility*; *"Living a Lie:" Confronting Hypocrisy*; *"Wandering the Wilderness:" Searching*; *"Worm to Butterfly:" Transformation*; *"Bringing Me to Shore:" Support*.

"Innately Bad:" Blame and Responsibility

An invariant that emerged from the data was the *Blame and Responsibility* that the women experienced through self-blame and blame from others. Previous research has indicated that self-blame is a common experience for survivors of CSA (LoVerso, 2008), and as such, it is not surprising that the women in the present study also experienced self-blame. The women felt that they somehow played a role in the sexual abuse and they questioned the responsibility they had "simply because they were there and sexual acts were performed on them" (Houg, 2008, p. 145). The women expressed feelings of shame, embarrassment, and guilt over their perceived contribution to the sexual abuse. Janet reflected that as a child, she could have taken her clothes into the bathroom so that her dad did not walk in on her, resulting in the sexual abuse.

Another way in which the women internalized their responsibility for the CSA was through the ownership that they vocalized over their sexual abuse. Marie commented that she felt that there was something "bad" about her, something that had caused her to be a target for the sexual abuse that was perpetrated against her. This is an example of the negative spiritual coping method of Punishing God reappraisal: "redefining the stressor as a punishment from God for the individual's sins" (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87).

Besides blaming themselves for their sexual abuse, the women described feeling judged and blamed by other people. They inferred that the people within their religious institutions were not, or would not be supportive of their CSA disclosure. Finkelhor and Browne (1985) also found that "stigmatization is also reinforced by attitudes that the victim infers or hears from other persons in the family or community" (p. 533). Thus, the women perceived that they were being judged and blamed for the sexual abuse and they described feeling excluded from their churches and ostracized by the people within their church. Previous research has indicated that survivors may feel generally alienated from other people, religion, and social institutions (Finkelhor, Hotelling, Lewis & Smith, 1989). Finkelhor and Browne (1985) suggested that "keeping the secret of having been a victim of sexual abuse may increase the sense of stigma, since it

reinforces the sense of being different” (p. 533). The blame from others that the women described led to their Interpersonal Religious Discontent: “expressing confusion and dissatisfaction with the clergy or members” (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87).

Consistent with previous research, obstacles such as shame and self-blame as well as blame and judgment from others impeded the women’s spiritual development, growth, and healing (Houg, 2008). The resulting spiritual coping method was Spiritual discontent: “expressions of confusion, alienation, and dissatisfaction with God” (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). It appears as though the women’s spiritual coping was negatively impacted by *Blame and Responsibility* and resulted in negative spiritual coping.

“Living a Lie:” Confronting Hypocrisy

Each of the women identified the experience of *Confronting Hypocrisy* resulting from the mis-alignment and tension between what they were being taught and what was being modelled to them by the adults in their lives. The juxtaposition between the two resulted in confusion for these women. As children, they expressed being aware that the adults around them were cognizant of the abuse, but they experienced what they described to be “unspoken messages” indicating to the women that they had to put up with the abuse.

As previously discussed, sexual abuse occurs within patriarchal societies and gendered social contexts. Herman (2000) stated that:

The sexual abuse of children is as old as patriarchy itself. Fathers have had sexual relations with their children from time immemorial and they are likely to continue to do so for a long time to come. As long as fathers dominate their families, they will have the power to make sexual use of their children. Most fathers will choose not to exercise this power; but as long as the prerogative is implicitly granted to all men, some men will use it. (p. 202)

The women in the present research articulated their experiences of being raised in patriarchal homes and societies. Thus, it would follow that these women experienced sexual abuse by their fathers, as the sexual abuse may be “an inevitable result of patriarchal family structure” (Herman, 2000, p. 202). Herman (2000) described incestuous families as representing male dominance in which:

daughters learned that their fathers rule, that mothers submit, that the ordinary female condition is contemptible, and that exceptions can be made for the favourite of a

powerful male. Far from being unusual, these lessons are part of the ordinary experience of girlhood. (p. 124)

These were common experiences described by the women in the present study. The women came to understand and believe through their experiences of sexual abuse and subsequent trauma that they were designed to be abused and their purpose was to serve as objects of others' pleasure.

The women in the present research were raised in strict fundamentalist Christian backgrounds, which are reportedly experienced as "subtly or inherently abusive" as "their religious system either ignored the abuse or supported acts of abuse (e.g., by teaching that one submits to adults in authority)" (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996, p. 255). The women indicated experiencing submission through such teachings as "honour thy father and mother." The women developed sensitivity to hypocrisy as a result of the abuse that was being perpetrated on them by their fathers, which contradicted the tenet that taught the women to honour their parents. These divergent experiences left the women feeling betrayed and unable to have general trust.

Previous research suggested that the developmental and spiritual growth of children following sexual abuse seems to be arrested at the same age as when the abuse occurred, and their developmental and spiritual growth is therefore potentially underdeveloped (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996). There are several obstacles that may impede the spiritual development of children following CSA. *Mistrust*, which reportedly occurs through the violation of safety by authority figures, is the primary obstacle that may hinder spiritual development (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996). The capacity for survivors to trust is severed as a result of the betrayal and deception experienced when sexual abuse occurs by adults who are close to them (Finkelhor et al., 1998, p. 393). Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) stated that following sexual trauma, survivors report feeling unsafe with authority figures "and to the extent that God is viewed as an authority figure who is judging, ominous, and overbearing, their mistrust can extend to that God or Higher Power" (p. 254). They found that survivors "frequently transfer their feelings about the perpetrators to God" (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996, p. 254). CSA survivors are more disillusioned by religion than non-victims simply because they have experienced "the world and perhaps authority as malevolent" (Finkelhor et al., 1998, p. 394), thus making it difficult for them to believe in God who may be recognized as the ultimate authority figure.

Gall et al. (2007) summarized two competing theories regarding attachment to God; with the first theory suggesting that the relationship an individual has with their parental figures is reflective or corresponds to their relationship with God. Individuals may develop a negative attachment to God as an extension of the negative relationships they experience with their parents following their sexual abuse (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996). Conversely, the second theory proposed that survivors may develop a secure and positive attachment to God or a Higher Power in order to compensate for their disrupted and difficult attachments in childhood (Gall et al., 2007). This relationship may “function as a protective factor in the face of a high-risk situation such as childhood maltreatment” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 103). The women in the present research appeared to develop an insecure attachment to God, which paralleled their parental attachments.

In addition to the betrayal that the women experienced by their fathers, they also suffered betrayal by their mothers and other family members who were either unwilling or unable to protect or believe them, a common experience for survivors of CSA (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Previous literature indicated that it is also common for survivors to feel betrayed and abandoned by God and their childhood religions (Houg, 2008). Given this feeling of abandonment, it was not surprising that the women questioned and challenged what they had been taught to believe as children. Following their experiences of betrayal and mistrust, the women likely experienced a Reappraisal of God’s Powers, which has been found to be a negative spiritual coping method (Pargament, Smith, et al., 1998; Pargament, Zinnbauer, et al., 1998) and is the redefining of “God’s powers to influence the stressful situation” (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). Reappraising God’s powers indicated to the women that God was not as omnipotent as they had originally been taught to believe (Harrison et al., 2001). Further, this may have caused the women to experience Spiritual Discontent, “expressions of confusion, alienation, and dissatisfaction with God,” as they questioned God’s love for them, wondering if He had abandoned them and if He really did care for them (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). The women discovered they were angry with God and subsequently each of them turned away from Him.

“Wandering the Wilderness:” Searching

The women in the present research experienced a spiritual struggle following their experiences of sexual abuse, which caused them to question God and their faith, either subconsciously or consciously. They described a tension between the religion they were brought

up in and their actual lived experiences, which led to tremendous angst. The women departed from their childhood religion because of the doubt they had towards God and their faith following their experiences of CSA. This is consistent with Houg's (2008) research, which indicated that the majority of her participants turned away from God and/or religion at some point in adolescence, entering a period of anger and rebellion. As such, the women's spiritual coping methods were significantly impacted by their changing spirituality.

As a result of their experiences of CSA and during their search for a different spirituality than the one they were brought up in, both Marie and Dawn recognized that they had doubts about God which established the spiritual coping method of Reappraisal of God's Powers (Harrison et al., 2001). In relation to the serious and life threatening illness Janet faced, she described using Benevolent Religious Reappraisal which is the ability to redefine the stressor as "benevolent and potentially beneficial" through religion (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). As this is the method of spiritual coping that Janet used to cope with a different traumatic life experience, it would follow that she may have also used this method to work towards healing from her experience of CSA as she believed that God lets everything happen in His time for His purpose.

The angst that the women described experiencing propelled them on a trajectory of spiritual discontent, prompting their search for a spirituality that was more congruent for them. Pargament, Smith, et al. (1998) wrote that Spiritual Discontent is a form of negative spiritual coping, resulting in tension and a tenuous worldview. Thus, in order to make sense of their experiences and to find meaning from them, the women were compelled to search and explore different spiritualities from the religions they were raised in. Therefore, the Spiritual Discontent experienced by the women led to Self-directing Religious Coping, which is "seeking control through individual initiative rather than relying on God" (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). Gall (2006) suggested that survivors may engage in Self-directing Religious Coping because they have recognized God as "an unhelpful source of support," leading them to turn away from God, "and to turn to the self as the only reliable support in handling a stressful life event" (p. 840).

The struggle that the women faced regarding their spirituality typically led to increased distress and is referred to as negative spiritual coping (Fallot & Heckman, 2005). However, Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) suggested that "some forms of negative religious coping may represent spiritual struggles that are actually pathways on the road towards growth, a notion that is consistent with various religious traditions that teach that struggle often precedes growth" (p.

474). This appears to be consistent with the experiences of the women in the present study as they became empowered to take control of their spirituality and began to explore alternatives to their inherited religions. Similar to the women in Nkongho's (2006) study who "created a new relationship, questioned an existing relationship, or strengthened the relationship I already had with the divine" (p. 69), through exploration the women in the present study also talked about questioning their previous relationship with God and their faith, creating new relationship, or strengthening the relationship they already had. The women's exploration had varying outcomes but was ultimately consistent with the current literature.

"Worm to Butterfly:" Transformation

The previous discussion of the invariant "*Wandering the Wilderness:*" *Searching* revealed the angst and exploration that the women encountered following their experiences of CSA. The women in the current study experienced profound shifts in their spirituality over time as a result of the trauma they encountered, which is consistent with the existing literature (Knapik et al., 2008). Houg (2008) described this spiritual transition as occurring a number of years after the sexual abuse, often precipitated by significant life experiences such as "a spiritual awakening, going through a negative life event, or with the help of a spiritual mentor, therapy, or a 12 Step program" (p. 55).

Although the women in the current study turned away from Christianity, they continued to explore alternatives to Christianity, seeking spirituality within their lives. All three women employed this positive spiritual coping method known as Religious Conversion in which the women looked for a "total spiritual reawakening" or "hoped for a spiritual rebirth" (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000, p. 524). Similar to Houg's (2008) research, the women entered into a spirituality that was transformed from their childhood religion. The majority of Houg's (2008) participants experienced transitions in their concepts of spirituality beginning with some sort of relationship with God early on in life, followed by a departure from God and the religion of their upbringing, and finally, a re-conceptualization of spirituality that became more inclusive and flexible. Other research by Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) demonstrated that survivors:

must reconcile earlier messages with current beliefs. For some, this means joining a religion, although many clients are unable to do so until later in their healing. For others, it involves differentiating religion from spirituality and choosing nonreligious methods of spiritual practice. (p. 255)

This illustration of spiritual transition is identical to the transition described by the women in the current study. Congruent with Houg's (2008) description: "The later transition often included increased acceptance and tolerance of a variety of religious beliefs and practices" (p. 56), the women in the present study also expanded their views of spirituality. Through their Religious Conversion, the women were exposed to various rituals, practices, and coping behaviours, which could be considered a type of spiritual coping known as Religious Focus in which survivors engage in "religious activities to shift focus from the stressor" (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). Although the activities the women practiced were not specifically religious, they were spiritual, (i.e. forgiveness/letting go; sweats: prayer; Hail Mary; burning incense/sage; smudging; and, speaking in tongues) and they assisted the women towards healing from their experiences of CSA. This is congruent with research indicating that spiritual behaviours may act as a support for survivors of CSA (Gall et al., 2007, p. 102).

"Bringing Me to Shore:" Support

The women in the present study described their previous relationships as being fraught with difficulties, dysfunction, and abuse, which is common for survivors of CSA (i.e., Davis & Petetric-Jackson, 2000; Houg, 2008). One of the challenges the women in the present study faced was to learn how to form healthy and positive relationships with others (Houg, 2008). Spiritual coping appears to have been a contributing factor for these women in achieving acceptance from and connection with others, which resulted in support with their experiences of CSA. Social support, self-acceptance, and positive relations with others have been found to contribute to survivor resiliency (McClure et al., 2008). As such, these variables are important for survivors of CSA.

Gall et al. (2007) insinuated that survivors who engage in positive relationships might be able to find self-acceptance despite negative consequences of traumatic histories. They found that self-acceptance in combination with personal hope is "predictive of lower levels of depressive mood and greater levels of experienced resolution of the abuse" (p. 114). Therefore, for the women in the present study, self-acceptance and support facilitated their resiliency and enhanced their healing. Houg (2008) took the concept of self-acceptance one step further. She explained it in terms of love for self, for others, and for God, indicating that it is not important which type of love comes first as the process of healing through love "appears to be cyclical, implying that wherever love begins, it continues and reinforces other aspects of healing" (p.

147). Houg (2008) described it in this way: “some women experienced God’s love first, and were then able to experience Self and Other love; still other women experienced Other love that led to feeling God’s love and Self love” (p. 147).

In her study on religious coping among sexually abused adolescent girls, Nkongho (2006) found that “religious coping as a phenomenon is experienced as a relationship with the sacred” (p. 62). As such, the adolescents drew on the support of the “sacred” or “higher being” in order to facilitate healing from CSA. This is similar to the women in the current study who, through their exploration, eventually developed relationship through a connection with others. This could be referred to as a Spiritual Connection: “seeking a sense of connectedness with forces that transcend the individual” (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). Previous research confirms the finding that connection is a significant aspect of the women’s positive spiritual coping as relationships are developed through connection, and the support that the women gain from these relationships assists in further healing from CSA (i.e., Gall, 2006; Glaister & Abel, 2001). In fact, Gall et al. (2007) suggested that for survivors, a relationship with a higher power might act “as a resource in their coping with everyday life stress including perhaps the residual effects of their history of abuse” (p. 112).

Upon reconnecting with God later in life, Janet engaged in Collaborative Religious Coping, which is “seeking control through a partnership with God in problem solving,” and Active Religious Surrender, “an active giving up of control to God in coping” (Pargament et al., 2000, p. 522). She began her healing by working with God to make sense of her experience and to relieve the pain, suffering, and negative consequences resulting from her experience of sexual abuse. Upon taking control of what she could, and doing the best that she could, she turned control over to God. In doing so, she used the spiritual coping method Seeking Spiritual Support that is “searching for comfort and reassurance through God’s love and care” (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). As she moved through her healing, Janet engaged in positive spiritual coping methods more frequently and consistently, which enhanced her healing. By finding and accepting more support for herself, she was also able to practice Religious Helping, which is an attempt “to provide spiritual support and comfort to others” (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 87). She found Religious Helping to be mutually beneficial to herself and others.

The women in the present study found the support and connections that they made in their relationships to assist them in healing from their sexual abuse. Houg’s (2008) research

supports the finding that positive relationships are beneficial to survivors of CSA and “can go a long way toward healing the negative effects of CSA” (p. 151). The support through mentors and other community members that the women each received was pivotal to their use of positive spiritual coping methods in their healing from CSA.

Essential Structure

The invariants depict a combination of positive and negative spiritual coping methods used by the women in the present research, which formed the essential structure of the experience of spiritual coping among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The co-existence of positive and negative forms of spiritual coping is consistent with research, which has claimed spiritual coping to be multi-faceted (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). Despite the fact that negative forms of spiritual coping were found in the present research, there is evidence to suggest that spirituality is an important aspect of healing for survivors of CSA (Fallot & Heckman, 2005). Fallot and Heckman (2005) wrote: “even in study samples that report negative relationships between trauma and spirituality, respondents often simultaneously note the importance and value of spirituality in their lives and in their recovery process” (p. 216).

Out of the traumagenic dynamics model proposed by Finkelhor and Browne (1985) arose four trauma-causing factors experienced by survivors of CSA. The four factors include: traumatic sexualization, betrayal, powerlessness, and stigmatization. The powerlessness dynamic, also known as disempowerment, “refers to the process in which the child’s will, desires, and sense of efficacy are continually contravened” (p. 532). In other words, a certain degree of powerlessness occurs when a child’s personal space is repeatedly violated through sexual abuse (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Therefore, “the dynamic of powerlessness distorts children’s sense of their ability to control their lives” (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985, p. 531). This dynamic of Powerlessness relates to two core features of CSA specific trauma: a lack of control “in which the child is overpowered and unable to take control in the sexual abuse,” and the loss of control that children face when, for example, their bodies betray them and respond sexually to the abuse (Sanderson, 2006, p. 151). Therefore, Sanderson (2006) suggested that it is difficult for children who have experienced sexual abuse to develop an internal locus of control. The women in the present research continually acknowledged this powerlessness and lack of control throughout their stories.

An inner-directed locus of control and recognition of personal power assisted these women

in surviving and overcoming their experiences of CSA (Valentine & Feinauer, 1993). The authors described these as resiliency themes for survivors of CSA, facilitating their future success in life. However, Gall (2006) noted that “the ‘giving-up’ of personal control (which was denied to them as abused children)” might be “an on-going internal struggle” for survivors (p. 839). As control appears to be closely related to other issues such as trust (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996), it would follow that it is especially difficult to achieve the delicate balance between maintaining and relinquishing power and control as a result of the mistrust that survivors experience.

According to Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996), it is also very difficult for survivors to grow spiritually as a “certain degree of surrendering control” is required, and survivors “may struggle with the conflict between controlling the spiritual source and yielding to this source” (p. 255). Gall (2006) delineated the four methods of spiritual coping related to gaining control: Active Surrender, which is “the active handing over of control to God;” Passive Deferral, “the passive waiting for God to control the situation;” Pleading, which is “the asking for a miracle or divine intercession;” and, Self-Directed, “the use of individual initiative with no help from God” (p. 833).

As previously discussed, the women in the present study employed several of these coping methods. The women implied that their spiritual coping changed and developed as they began to have more control in their lives and as they became empowered. One woman marvelled at the strength of the human spirit despite adversity confronting survivors: “I think the other thing with the spirituality is that [pause] once you’ve been sexually abused, there’s a part of your spirit – and this is my belief – there’s a part of your spirit that either crumbles, or get’s stronger.” Although survivors have described their abusers as “having attempted to destroy their spirit or their soul,” many survivors have indicated that their spiritual power is one area that the perpetrator could not easily affect (Ganje-Fling and McCarthy, 1996, p. 255).

Strengths and Limitations

There is limited research, particularly qualitative in nature, available on the experience of spiritual coping among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). The results of the present study enhance understanding about spiritual coping and its impact on adult women survivors of CSA. A descriptive phenomenological approach provided the women in the present study a voice and yielded rich descriptions of their lived experiences. The women expressed

hope that their stories would have a positive impact for other survivors of CSA. They also expressed hope that their stories would bring awareness to others who have not experienced spiritual coping regarding their CSA, especially for professionals who work with survivors of CSA.

The women in the present study expressed that they found participating to be of personal benefit to them as it generated self-awareness regarding their personal healing journey; they shared how their participation validated their experiences and facilitated further healing. Janet and Marie both indicated how revisiting their painful pasts has helped them appreciate how far they have come in their healing, and the strength that they currently possess as a result of their healing journey. Dawn articulated that it had been difficult to talk about her experiences of CSA and that she had nightmares following our discussions. However, these difficulties reminded her that she is still healing and that she cannot take for granted where she is at today. It appeared that the interview process acted as a form of intervention as the women found participating to be therapeutic (Houg, 2008). Sharing their stories by participating in the present research enhanced the women's healing processes, as they were able to break the boundaries of silence and the taboo surrounding CSA.

Lastly, I found it surprising that none of the women had been encouraged by their support systems to consider how their spirituality had been impacted by their experiences of CSA and vice versa. All three women had spent time exploring their experiences of CSA and their spirituality; however, the women indicated that they had not considered or processed the two in relation to each other. The present research provided them opportunity to do so.

Although not perfect, the phenomenological reduction which is the process of setting aside previously held beliefs and assumptions, acts as a check and balance system for concerns of error or deceit (Giorgi, 2008). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) explained, "epistemological claims are based solely on how situations were experienced or remembered by the participant" (p. 47). The phenomenological reduction heightens this step as the reduction makes epistemological claims "for how things presented themselves to the experiencers, not for how they actually were" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 48). The phenomenological reduction also addresses the possibility of deceit as "the epistemological claim is only for the experiential structure, not for the objective reality" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 48). Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) explained that phenomenological research is discovery oriented, and as such, there is no specific theory or

hypothesis being advanced. Therefore, there is no evident reason for participants to be deceitful (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

Adding to the possible lack of transferability for the present research was the limited response received. Possibly due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it was difficult to recruit and retain participants. A number of prospective participants identified their willingness to participate in the present study. However, due to ethical concerns, such as dual relationships, they could not be considered for participation.

Ideally in descriptive phenomenological research there would be maximum variation sampling among participants by choosing “an array of individuals who provide a variety of specific experiences of the topic being explored” in order “to generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analyzing a phenomena” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 48). However, the participants in the present study happened to be a rather homogenous group as they were all between the ages of 45-48, middle-class, with a minimum of a high school education. Additionally, there was little diversity among the women as all three were brought up in the religion of Christianity. Also, two of the women identified as being Caucasian, while the third identified as being Métis. Therefore, the results might vary for other CSA survivors with different sexual abuse contexts and ethnic and spiritual or religious backgrounds.

A particular challenge and possible limitation for the present research was the overlap in terminology and unclear distinction between “religion,” “spirituality,” and “spiritual coping.” Having required participants to self-define these concepts, there was some confusion between concepts and occasional lack of clarity in the women’s stories. Additionally, the women self-identified whether they had used spiritual coping within their experience of child sexual abuse although a definition was not provided for them.

Considerations For Future Research

Child sexual abuse can have life altering and devastating impacts for individuals, families, and societies for generations. As such, it is important to continue researching the ways in which survivors are best supported and able to heal from their abuse. The present research reveals how much is yet to be learned about the phenomena of spiritual coping in relation to CSA as minimal extant knowledge has been established thus far. Therefore, I would recommend exploring the meaning of spiritual coping for various populations to better understand how it is

experienced by others, and to begin to conceptualize how spiritual coping might promote the healing and growth for certain individuals.

In the present study, the participants were a relatively homogeneous group in relation to their ages and context of abuse. Future research should examine women varying in age, life stage, and contexts, as it is important to consider how other women experience spiritual coping. As men's experiences may differ from that of women and virtually no research exists for the healing processes of male survivors of CSA, it would also be valuable to expand research to include men. Additionally, Houg (2008) has suggested that research should examine the effects of spirituality and spiritual coping on other types of experiences including "those who did not have the experience of a religious childhood or those who are survivors of other types of childhood trauma" (p. 154). Exploring the experiences of spiritual coping among women who have not experienced CSA may also be helpful in providing greater insight into the aspects of CSA that contribute to the way in which spiritual coping is experienced notwithstanding a history of abuse and trauma.

The recruitment method used in the present study may have contributed to the homogeneity in the women and so alternate recruitment methods should be examined. Alternative recruitment suggestions would be to hang posters around post-secondary campuses, advertise in the local newspaper, email notice to electronic list servers, post on internet advertising agencies, or make announcements in support groups, classrooms, or group gatherings such as: cultural events (i.e. pow wows), bible studies, hobby groups, and ceremonial feasts. These alternate recruitment methods may draw a more diverse population including younger and older participants.

Another recommendation for future research would be to examine the phenomena across time (temporality) and life experiences, as each of the women in the present study identified experiencing a spiritual shift over the course of their lives. By engaging with participants over a longer period of time, future researchers might be able to gain a better understanding of the experience of spiritual coping and how it changes over time. As previous research has conceptualized coping as a process (Lazarus, 1993), it would be valuable to understand more about the spiritual coping efforts that survivors engage in initially, long-term, and consistently over time (Oaksford & Frude, 2003). This knowledge might help determine which aspects of

spiritual coping are hindering to clients' well-being, and which methods enhance or promote their health and growth.

Houg (2008) suggested that longitudinal research examining “recovery process across the lifespan would deepen our understanding about the role of spirituality and where and when interventions with a spiritual focus might be most helpful” (p. 155). Research has shown that not all therapists are equipped to provide a psychospiritual framework to their clients, nor is it appropriate for all clients. Therefore, future research should also focus on the most effective and appropriate time and place for the topic of spirituality to be addressed within the therapeutic context (Houg, 2008).

Considerations For Mental Health Professionals

The findings of the present study may be useful to mental health professionals as they are commonly in contact with women who have histories of CSA, whether they are aware of it or not. The experiences of spiritual coping for the women in the present study may offer insight for clinicians working with survivors of CSA to help reduce the difficulties that survivors encounter following their sexual abuse experiences. Given the results of the current study and the growing evidence that spirituality can facilitate resilience and promote healing and well-being, it would follow that spirituality is an important component of the therapeutic relationship.

Historically, there has been a major shift in the therapeutic world regarding the importance and relevance of addressing spirituality within the therapeutic relationship (Aten & Leach, 2009; Lines, 2006; West, 2004). In their book, *Spirituality and the Therapeutic Process*, Aten and Leach (2009) provided a summary of the historical evolution of spirituality/religion in relationship to therapy. I will briefly summarize their work in order to provide context to the issue at hand.

Aten and Leach (2009) described a social climate which saw major change and shifts in thinking with the science of psychology and “talk therapy” replacing the traditional care and counsel of churches and priests. Historical events and conflicts led to a schism between leaders in spirituality and mental health, resulting in relationships of “mistrust, misunderstanding, and missed opportunities” (Aten & Leach, 2009, p. 14). Spirituality/religion was removed from the therapeutic context altogether, and was even found to be in opposition of psychology and mental health (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006).

Evidence demonstrated a renewed interest and acceptance in the area of spirituality and religion by the mid-1980s to early 1990s as mental health professionals more positively conceptualized religion and spirituality. Several factors have contributed to this shift in perspective and positive upsurge in the view of religion and spirituality. The ascendancy of multicultural sensitivity and awareness of cultural diversity in counselling since the mid-1990s has led to tremendous interest in “the integration of spirituality and religion into clinical work” as an area of competence required to address client diversity (Parker, 2009, p. 112).

In their review of recent empirical research, Post and Wade (2009), found that “therapists are open to religious/spiritual issues, that clients want to discuss these matters in therapy, and that the use of religious/spiritual interventions for some clients can be an effective adjunct to traditional therapy interventions” (p. 131). Despite the historical context of spirituality/religion in psychotherapy, and the move to make spiritual/religious issues central to therapy, the degree to which these topics are addressed within the therapeutic relationship is still uncertain, and proven by research to be inadequate (e.g., Hathaway, Scott, & Garver, 2004; Houg, 2008). The lack of focus on spiritual and religious issues in psychotherapy begs the question as to whether psychotherapists and counsellors are receiving sufficient training and are equipped to address the spiritual issues of their clients (West, 2004).

In their review of the literature, Hage et al. (2006) found that according to counsellor educators, counselling faculty, and clinical training program leaders, graduate students in programs such as clinical psychology, counselling psychology, marriage and family therapy, and psychiatry received minimal preparation in spiritual and religious diversity and interventions. They concluded that there are “few efforts to introduce students in counselling education programs to theories of religious and spiritual development or to religious and spiritual manifestations of psychological disorders” (Hage et al., 2006, p. 227). Similarly, Aten and Leach (2009) found that few mental health professionals have received proper training for working with the spiritual and religious beliefs of their clients despite an increased awareness of the potential benefits of attending to these needs. This results in mental health professionals’ own discomfort and perceived lack of skill, ability, and qualification to explore issues of spirituality/religion with their clients (Hathaway et al., 2004; Houg, 2008). It has been suggested that excluding spirituality/religion from therapy may be failing to provide a critical component for effective treatment (Hathaway et al., 2004).

As spiritual/religious training is limited, it is important for clinicians to recognize their limitations and address concerns of spirituality/religion that is within their scope of practice. Ensuring therapist competency may increase therapist and client confidence in addressing spirituality/religion in therapy, thus better meeting clients' needs. Based on her research, Nkongho (2006) encouraged psychotherapists to respect all aspects of their client's experiences of religious coping even the parts that seem ambivalent and paradoxical. In addition, she suggested that therapists "learn the client's religious coping language," "ask the client about her experience of religious coping," and "explore her own beliefs about religious coping" (p. 66). Similarly, West (2004) suggested that therapists also work on and develop their own personal spirituality in order to honour their own as well as their client's spirituality.

The results of the present study suggest that spirituality and spiritual coping should be explored within the therapeutic relationship as they have been demonstrated to have an impact on the posttraumatic growth and healing of some women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. This is supported by West (2004) who believed "that a careful consideration of spirituality in its healthy and less healthy forms should now be seen as an essential and necessary part of effective therapy" (p. 152). Therefore, when working with survivors of CSA, it would be beneficial to use a *psychospiritual* frame/practice, which is described as "ways of psychotherapeutically working with clients that is inclusive of spirituality" (p. 142). Most importantly, interventions that focus on positive spiritual coping should be explored for survivors of CSA.

Personal Reflection

One of the struggles that I had as a researcher was attempting to remain as objective as possible despite the impossibility of remaining truly objective in qualitative research. Interpretivism-constructivism, the paradigm to which I adhere, suggests that subjectivity is not only inevitable, but that subjectivity is to be embraced in the research process. However, in order to remain true to phenomenology, the methodology that guided this research process, it was necessary for me to set aside any beliefs or judgments I had at the onset of this research. As previously stated, this was done through the process of epoché. My struggle was in maintaining the delicate balance between subjectivity and objectivity. I felt that I was subjective and transparent through the sharing of my personal experience in the first chapter, as well as in this personal reflection in the final chapter. Additionally, the research that was attended to for the purposes of the Literature Review chapter also presented my previous assumptions and

knowledge of the research topic. As such, this is the way in which I was true to the subjectivity required by the interpretivist-constructivist framework. It was very important to me that the women's voices were first and foremost, and were appropriately represented as they are the experts of their lived experiences. Therefore, I did not want my voice to emerge more than necessary at the risk of overshadowing or overpowering the other women's voices.

Another struggle that I faced was with the existing terminology. It was difficult to work with definitions of spiritual coping as well as positive and negative spiritual coping when there was no pre-existing definition. Further, as a result of discussions that have stemmed from this research, I have come to understand and believe that it is more accurate to talk about spiritual coping in terms of a struggle, rather than spiritual coping as either *positive* or *negative* which, is very black and white. The language *positive* and *negative* are labels and categories which, help define, simplify, and provide understanding for concepts that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable. In reality, spiritual coping has demonstrated to be a complex and messy process through this research, and it has appeared to be neither purely positive nor purely negative, but a combination of both. Therefore, for future research and consideration, spiritual coping should be thought of in terms of being a struggle.

My personal assumption when I began the present research was that spirituality would be seen as a protective factor in relation to CSA, and that spiritual coping was positive. I believed that spiritual coping would facilitate survivor resilience, and enhance their healing. However, I quickly learned through my review of the literature and then through hearing about the lived experiences of the women, that there were marked differences from my own personal experience, understanding, or beliefs. Although I share a similar history with the women in the present research in that we are all survivors of childhood sexual abuse, I believe my spiritual coping presented very differently initially. Whereas the women I interviewed described themselves as straying from the religion of their upbringing following their sexual abuse, I clung to my faith even tighter than before. I relied on my faith and my God to get me through, and I felt that I maintained this faith along my journey.

For the most part, I found it surprisingly easy to set aside my personal beliefs and assumptions and to hear the women's stories. However, there were times when I found it difficult to understand or relate to what the individual woman was saying, and other times when I may have over-related or assumed to know what they were describing. Being "in the moment"

with each of the women and listening to their experiences with an open mind helped challenge my presuppositions of the phenomena under examination. The women provided me with a different perspective from my own, and helped to illuminate the experience of spiritual coping for women survivors of CSA. Nkongho (2006) suggested that:

The purpose of a phenomenological investigation is to explore and describe the nature of a phenomenon as an individual experiences it; in the process of doing this work, researchers might also expect, anticipate, and plan to appropriately acknowledge that their connection to the topic will continue to emerge and evolve. (p. 80)

Over the course of writing this thesis, I experienced a personal tragedy, which was incredibly traumatic and life changing. I found myself confronting God and questioning my beliefs in a way that I had never experienced before, but had become familiar with through the women in the present research as their descriptions of doubt appeared to be similar to my own. This significant experience and the doubt I had been left with regarding my personal religious beliefs allowed me a unique perspective and insight into the challenges that these women may have faced during their journeys. It also afforded me the opportunity to more fully understand their experiences. Not unlike the women who shared some of their most intimate stories with me, my own recent experience stimulated further self-reflection, causing me to explore, examine, question, challenge, and confront my own spiritual coping with this new trauma.

I found it impossible to continue with the writing process, specifically the data analysis, before first taking some time to evaluate my own spiritual coping. Although the bulk of my thesis work had been completed prior to the tragedy I experienced, I needed to go through the process of epoché all over again as I had gained a different perspective and brought forth a new experience. I did not want to unintentionally influence the remainder of the research and findings with new, unprocessed experiences. I found it necessary to take a step back in order to more effectively bracket and set aside my own assumptions and biases about this phenomenon. Through a heightened consciousness and awareness of how I have experienced spiritual coping, I was able to consider the impact of my experience on the data analysis; how my experience might influence my analysis of the women's experiences, and in turn, how the women's experiences may have influenced my understanding and perceptions of my own experience.

My experience of self-reflection with the phenomena is consistent with literature that explores issues such as spirituality and trauma through phenomenological analysis. Nkongho

(2006) suggested “the very nature of these methods both requires and demands a heightened willingness for self-exploration and self-awareness, challenging researchers to acknowledge their connection and experience with the topic as a necessary component of data analysis” (p. 79).

In addition to this period of self-reflection following my recent loss, I began to doubt my analysis and question my results, which caused me to re-examine my research method and methodology. I re-evaluated the research process and re-read everything I could find about Giorgi’s empirical phenomenology in order to ensure that I had stayed true to the methodology. I discovered that I had in fact strayed and was considering the “invariants” to be “meaning units,” a process that occurs much earlier in the descriptive phenomenology method. Having revisited my data analysis with fresh eyes and a new perspective, and correcting my error in understanding the steps of descriptive phenomenology, I had increased confidence in my findings.

I have learned that despite the obstacles and challenges to my faith, my faith has been established, developed, informed, and strengthened to withstand any trauma that I may face. Although I may encounter periods of doubt and questioning, I still know that ultimately, my faith will remain more or less intact. I close this chapter with a version of the poem *Footprints*, which has carried me through the most difficult and trying times in my past, and continues to resonate with me:

Footprints

One night I had a dream--
I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord
and across the sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints,
one belonged to me and the other to the Lord.
When the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that many times along the path of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest
and saddest times in my life.
This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
you would walk with me all the way,
but I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life
there is only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why in times when I needed you most,
you should leave me."
The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child,
I love you and I would never, never leave you

during your times of trial and suffering.
"When you saw only one set of footprints,
it was then that I carried you."
Mary Stevenson

REFERENCES

- Ainscough, C., & Toon, K. (1996). *Breaking free: Help for survivors of child sexual abuse*. London: Sheldon Press.
- Ano, G. G., & Vasconcelles, E. B. (2005). Religious coping and psychological adjustment to stress: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 61*(4), 461-480.
- Aten, J. D., & Leach, M. M. (2009). A primer on spirituality and mental health. In Aten, J. D., & Leach, M. M. (Eds.), *Spirituality and the therapeutic process: A comprehensive resource from intake to termination* (pp. 9-19). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bagley, C. & King, K. (1990). *Child sexual abuse: The search for healing*. London: Tavistock.
- Banyard, V. L. (2003). Explaining links between sexual abuse and psychological distress: Identifying mediating processes. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 27*, 869-875.
- Banyard, V. L., & Williams, L. M. (2007). Women's voices on recovery: A mutli-method study of the complexity of recovery from child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 31*, 275-290.
- Bartky, S. (1977). Toward a phenomenology of feminist consciousness. In Braggin, M. V., Elliston, F., & English, J. (Eds.), *Feminism and philosophy* (pp. 23-47). Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams.
- Beitchman, J. H., Zucker, K. J., Hood, J. E., DaCosta, G. A., Akman, D., & Cassavia, E. (1992). A review of the long-term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 16*, 101-118.
- Belavich, T. G., & Pargament, K. I. (2002). The role of attachment in predicting spiritual coping with a loved one in surgery. *Journal of Adult Development, 9*(1), 13-29.
- Berry, K. A. (2007). *Exploring the experience of body self-compassion for young adult women who exercise* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan.
- Bjorck, J. P., & Thurman, J. W. (2007). Negative life events, patterns of positive and negative religious coping, and psychological functioning. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 46*(2), 159-167.
- Bloom, S. L., & Reichert, M. (1998). *Bearing witness: Violence and collective responsibility*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

- Bogar, C. B., & Hulse-Killacky, D. (2006). Resiliency determinants and resiliency processes among female adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 84(3), 318-327.
- Boyd, C. O. (2001). Phenomenology the method. In P. L. Munhall (Ed.) (3rd ed.), *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (pp. 93-122). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.
- Brand, B. L., & Alexander, P. C. (2003). Coping with incest: The relationship between recollections of childhood coping and adult functioning in female survivors of incest. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 16(3), 285-293.
- Briere, J., & Elliott, D. M. (2003). Prevalence and psychological sequelae of self-reported childhood physical and sexual abuse in a general population sample of men and women. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27(2003), 1205-1222.
- Briere, J. N., & Elliott, D. M. (1994). Immediate and long-term impacts of child sexual abuse. *The Future of Children*, 4(2), 54-69. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1602523>
- Brooks-Harris, J. E. (2008). *Integrative multitheoretical psychotherapy*. NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Brown, L. S. (1994). *Subversive dialogues: Theory in feminist therapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Browne, A., & Finkelhor, D. (1986). Initial and long-term effects: A review of the research. In D. Finkelhor, S. Araj, L. Baron, A. Browne, S. D. Peters, & G. E. Wyatt (Eds.), *A sourcebook on child sexual abuse* (pp. 143-179). CA: Sage.
- Bulik, C. M., Prescott, C. A., & Kendler, K. S. (2001). Features of childhood sexual abuse and the development of psychiatric and substance use disorders. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 179, 444-449.
- Burke Draucker, C. B., & Martsof, D. S. (2006). *Counselling survivors of childhood sexual abuse*. (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Burke Draucker, C. B., Noerager Stern, P., Wolbert Burgess, A., & Campbell, J. C. (2000). Women's responses to sexual violence by male intimates. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 22(4), 385-406.
- Bush, E. G., Rye, M. S., Brant, C. R. Emery, E., Pargament, K. I., & Riessinger, C. A. (1999). Religious coping with chronic pain. *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback*, 24(4), 249-260.
- Byrne, M.M. (2001). Understanding life experiences through a phenomenological approach to research. *Journal of The Association of periOperative Registered Nurses*, 8(2) 301-582.

- Casey, E. A., & Nurius, P. S. (2006). Trends in the prevalence and characteristics of sexual violence: A cohort analysis. *Violence and Victims*, 21(5), 629-644.
- Chandy, J. M., Blum, R. W., & Resnick, M. D. (1996). History of sexual abuse and parental alcohol misuse: Risk, outcomes and protective factors in adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 13(5), 411-432.
- Cloitre, M., Cohen, L. R., & Koenen, K. C. (2006). *Treating survivors of childhood abuse: Psychotherapy for the interrupted life*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35(2), 236.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Dallam, S., Gleaves, D. H., Cepeda-Benito, A., Silberg, J. L., Kraemer, H. C., & Spiegel, D. (2001). The effects of child sexual abuse: Comment on Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 715-733.
- Davis, J. L., & Petretic-Jackson, P. A. (2000). The impact of child sexual abuse on adult interpersonal functioning: A review and synthesis of the empirical literature. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 5(3), 291-328.
- de Castro, A. (2003). Introduction to Giorgi's existential phenomenological research method. *Psicología desde el Caribe*, 11, 45-56.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005) *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dervic, K., Grunebaum, M. F., Burke, A. K., Mann, J. J., & Oquendo, M. A. (2006). Protective factors against suicidal behaviour in depressed adults reporting childhood abuse. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 194(12), 971-974.

- Dinwiddie, S., Heath, A. C., Dunne, M. P., Bucholz, K. K., Madden, P. A. F., Slutske, W. S., . . . Martin, N. G. (2000). Early sexual abuse and lifetime psychopathology: A co-twin-control study. *Psychological Medicine*, 30, 41-52.
- Dorais, M. (2002). *Don't tell: The sexual abuse of boys*. Montréal, Canada: McGill-Queens University Press.
- Elliott, R., Fischer, C. T., & Rennie, D. L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 38, 215-229.
- Endacott, R., & Botti, M. (2007). Clinical research 3: Sample selection. *Accident & Emergency Nursing*, 15(4), 234-238.
- Everall, R. D., Truscott, D., & Paulson, B. L. (1999). Studying participants' experiences using concept mapping. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 45(3), 320.
- Exline, J. J., Yali, A. M., & Lobel, M. (1999). When God disappoints: Difficulty forgiving God and its role in negative emotion. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 4, 365-379.
- Exline, J. J., Yali, A. M., & Sanderson, W. C. (2000). Guilt, discord, and alienation: The role of religious strain in depression and suicidality. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56(12), 1481-1496.
- Fallot, R. D., & Heckman, J. P. (2005). Religious/spiritual coping among women trauma survivors with mental health and substance use disorders. *Journal of Behavioural Health Services & Research*, 32(2), 215-226.
- Feiring, C., Taska, L., & Lewis, M. (2002). Adjustment following sexual abuse discovery: The role of shame and attribution style. *American Psychological Association*, 38(1), 79-92.
- Finkelhor, D. (1984). *Child sexual abuse: New theory and research*. New York: The Free Press.
- Finkelhor, D. (2005). Sexually victimized children. In R. K. Bergen, J. L. Edelson & C. M. Renzetti (Eds.), *Violence against women: Classic papers* (pp. 42- 56). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Finkelhor, D., & Browne, A. (1985). The traumatic impact of child sexual abuse: A conceptualization. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatric*, 55(4), October, 530-541.
- Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G. T., Lewis, I. A., & Smith, C. (1989). Sexual abuse and its relationship to later sexual satisfaction, marital status, religion, and attitudes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 4, 379-399.

- Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G., Lewis, I. A., & Smith, C. (1990). Sexual abuse in a national survey of adult men and women: Prevalence, characteristics and risk factors. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 14, 19-28.
- Fitchett, G., Rybarczyk, B. D., DeMarco, G. A., & Nicholas, J. J. (1999). The role of religion in medical rehabilitation outcomes: A longitudinal study. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 44(4), 333-353.
- Fletcher, M. L. (2004). Women survivors of childhood sexual abuse: Narratives of relationships with their mothers (unpublished master's thesis). University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan.
- Frame, M. W. (2003). *Integrating religion and spirituality into counselling: A comprehensive approach*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Frazier, P., Tashiro, T., Berman, M., Steger, M., & Long, J. (2004). Correlates of levels and patterns of positive life changes following sexual assault. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(1), 19-30.
- Fromuth, M. E. (1986). The relationship of childhood sexual abuse with later psychological and sexual adjustment in a sample of college women. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 10, 5-15.
- Gall, T. L. (2000). Integrating religious resources within a general model of stress and coping: Long-term adjustment to breast cancer. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 39(2), 167-182.
- Gall, T. L. (2006). Spirituality and coping with life stress among adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30(7), 829-844.
- Gall, T.L., Basque, V., Damasceno-Scott, M., & Vardy, G. (2007). Spirituality and the current adjustment of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46(1), 101-117.
- Ganje-Fling, M. A., & McCarthy, P. (1996). Impact of childhood sexual abuse on client spiritual development: Counselling implications. *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 74, 253-258.
- Ganje-Fling, M., McCarthy Veach, P., Kuang, H., Houg, B. (2000). Effects of childhood sexual abuse on client spiritual well-being. *Counselling & Values*, 44(2), 84-91.
- Garko, M. G. (1999). Existential phenomenology and feminist research: The exploration and exposition of women's lived experience. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23, 167-175.

- Giorgi, A. (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 28(2) 235-260.
- Giorgi, A. (2002). The question of validity in qualitative research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 33(1), 1-18.
- Giorgi, A. (2005). The phenomenological movement and research in the human sciences. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 18(1), 75-82.
- Giorgi, A. (2006). The value of phenomenology for psychology. In P. Ashworth & M. C. Chung (Eds.), *Phenomenology and psychological science: Historical and philosophical perspectives* (pp. 45-68). New York, NY: Springer.
- Giorgi, A. & Giorgi, B. (2003). The descriptive phenomenological psychology method. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 243-273). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Giorgi, A. & Giorgi, B. (2008). Phenomenology. In J. A. Smith (Eds.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 26-52). London: Sage.
- Glaister, J. A., & Abel, E. (2001). Experiences of women healing from childhood sexual abuse. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, XV(4), 188-194.
- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1). Article 4. Retrieved from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf
- Guba, E. G. (1990). The alternative paradigm dialogue. In E. G. Guba (Ed.), *The paradigm dialogue* (pp. 17-30). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln Y.S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Haaken, J., & Lamb, S. (2000). The politics of child sexual abuse research. *Society*, 37(4), 7-14.
- Hage, S. M., Hopson, A., Siegel, M., Payton, G., & DeFanti, E. (2006). Multicultural training in spirituality: An interdisciplinary review. *Counseling and Values*, 50(3), 217-234.
- Hall, D. E., Catanzaro, A. M., Harrison, M. O., & Koenig, H. G. (2004a). Religion, spirituality and mysticism. *AM J Psychiatry*, 161(9), 1720-1721.
- Hall, D. E., Koenig, H. G., & Meador, K. G. (2004b). Conceptualizing "religion": How language shapes and constrains knowledge in the study of religion and health. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 47(3), 386-401.
- Harrison, M. O., Koenig, H. G., Hays, J. C., Eme-Akwari, A. G., & Pargament, K. I. (2001). The epidemiology of religious coping: A review of recent literature. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 13, 86-93.
- Hathaway, W. L., Scott, S. Y., & Garver, S. A. (2004). Assessing religious/spiritual functioning: A neglected domain in clinical practice? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 35(1), 97-104.
- Haverkamp, B. E., & Young, R. A. (2007). Paradigms, purpose, and the role of the literature: Formulating a rationale for qualitative investigations. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35(2), 265-294.
- Hazel, K. L., & Mohatt, G. V. (2001). Cultural and spiritual coping in sobriety: Informing substance abuse prevention for Alaska native communities. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(5), 541-562.
- Health Canada. (2004). *Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse – Overview Paper*. Retrieved from <http://www.sasian.org/pdf/adsurcxa.pdf>
- Hein, S. F., & Austin, W. J. (2001). Empirical and hermeneutic approaches to phenomenological research in psychology: A comparison. *Psychological Methods*, 6(1), 3-17.
- Herman, J. L. (1997). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: BasicBooks.
- Herman, J. L. (2000). *Father-daughter incest* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Herman, J. L. (2005). Reflection, Afterword, 2000: Understanding incest twenty years later. In R. K. Bergen, J. L. Edelson & C. M. Renzetti (Eds.), *Violence against women: Classic papers* (pp. 40-41). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

- Herman, J. L., & Hirschman, L. (2005). Father-daughter incest. In R. K. Bergen, J. L. Edelson & C. M. Renzetti (Eds.), *Violence against women: Classic papers* (pp. 21-39). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Hill, P. C., Pargament, K. I., Hood, R. W. Jr., McCullough, M. E., Swyers, J. P., Larson, D. B., & Zinnbauer, B. J. (2000). Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 30(1), 51-77.
- Hill, P. C., & Pargament, K. I. (2003). Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: Implications for physical and mental health research. *American Psychologist*, 58(1), 64-74.
- Horwitz, A. V., Widom, C. S., McLaughlin, J., & White, H. R. (2001). The impact of childhood abuse and neglect on adult mental health: A prospective study. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 42(2), 184-201.
- Houg, B. L. (2008). *The role of spirituality in the ongoing recovery process of female sexual abuse* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: Full Text (AAT 3330510).
- Hunter, S. V. (2006). Understanding the complexity of child sexual abuse: A review of the literature with implications for family counselling. *The Family Journal: Counselling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 14(4), 349-358.
- Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies*: 8(3), 279-303.
- Ipsos-Reid Survey. (2003). *Reader's Digest*. Montreal, Quebec: Readers Digest Magazines Canada.
- Jumper, S. A. (1995). A meta-analysis of the relationship of child sexual abuse to adult psychological adjustment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 19(6), 715-728.
- Katerndahl, D. A., Burge, S., & Kellogg, N. (2005). Psychiatric comorbidity in women with a history of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 14(3), 91-105.
- Kendall-Tackett, K.A., Williams, L. M., & Finkelhor, D. (1993). Impact of sexual abuse on children: A review and synthesis of recent empirical studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113(1), 164-180.

- Kendler, K. S., Bulik, C. M., Silberg, J., Hettsema, J. M., Myers, J., & Prescott, C. A. (2000). Childhood sexual abuse and adult psychiatric and substance use disorders in women: An epidemiological and cotwin control analysis. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 57, 953-959.
- Kennedy, J., Davis, R., & Taylor, B. (1998). Changes in spirituality and well-being among victims of sexual assault. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37(2), 322-328.
- Knapik, G. P., Martsof, D. S., & Draucker, C. B. (2008). Being delivered: Spirituality in survivors of sexual violence. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 29, 335-350.
- Koenig, H. G., Pargament, K. I., & Nielsen, J. (1998). Religious coping and health status in medically ill hospitalized older adults. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 186(9), 513-521.
- Krejci, M. J., Thompson, K. M., Simonich, H., Crosby, R. D., Donaldson, M. A., Wonderlich, S. A., & Mitchell, J. E. (2004). Sexual trauma, spirituality, and psychopathology. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 13(2), 85-103.
- Krug, E., Dahlberg, L., Mercy, J., Zwi, A., & Lozano, R. (2002). World report on violence and health. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Sage, London.
- Laird, L. M. (2008). *Mothers' experience of parenting with a former spouse*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT). (3338961)
- Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and method*. London, UK: Pearson Education.
- Laverty, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3). Article 3. Retrieved June 8th, 2009 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_3final/pdf/laverty.pdf
- Lazarus, R. S. (1993). Coping theory and research: Past, present, and future. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 55, 234-247.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lee, R. E., McGinnis, K. A., Sallis, J. F., Castro, C. M., Chen, A. H., & Hickmann, S. A. (1997). Active vs. passive methods of recruiting ethnic minority women to a health promotion program. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 19(4), 378-384.

- Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J. E. (2005). *Practical research: Planning and design* (7th ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Leserman, J. (2005). Sexual abuse history: Prevalence, health effects, mediators, and psychological treatment. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 67, 906-915.
- Levenkron, S., & Levenkron, A. (2007). *Stolen tomorrows: Understanding and treating women's childhood sexual abuse*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Denzin, N. K. (1994). The fifth moment. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 575-586). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Lines, D. (2006). *Spirituality in counselling and psychotherapy*. London: Sage.
- Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2004). Positive change following trauma and adversity: A review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 17(1), 11-21.
- Little, L. & Hamby, S. L. (1999). Gender differences in sexual abuse outcomes and recovery experiences: A survey of therapist-survivors. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 30(4), 378-385.
- LoVerso, T. (2008). *The experiences of overcoming self-blame among female adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT). (AAT MR47156)
- Mackenzie, N., & Knipe, S. (2006). Research dilemmas: Paradigms, methods and methodology. *Issues In Educational Research*, 16(2), 193-205. Retrieved from <http://www.iier.org.au/iier16/mackenzie.html>
- MacLeod, M., & Saraga, E. (1988). Challenging the orthodoxy: Towards a feminist theory and practice. *Feminist Review*, 28, 16-55.
- MacMillan, H. L., Fleming, J. E., Streiner, D. L., Lin, E., Boyle, M. H., Jamieson, E., . . . Beardslee, W. R. (2001). *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 158(11), 1878-1883.
- Margolin, J. A. (1999). *Breaking the silence, group therapy for childhood sexual abuse: A practitioner's manual*. New York: The Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B., (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Mathews, F. (1996). *The invisible boy: Revisioning the victimization of male children & teens*. Canadian Foster Family Association (CFFA) on behalf of the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence of Health Canada.
- McCann, I. L., & Pearlman, L. A. (1990). *Psychological trauma and the adult survivor: Theory, therapy, and transformation*. New York : Brunner/Mazel.
- McClure, F. H., Chavez, D. V., Agars, M. D., Peacock, M. J., & Matosian, A. (2008). Resilience in sexually abused women: Risk and protective factors. *Journal of Family Violence*, 23, 81-88.
- McIntosh, D., Silver, R. C., & Wortman, C. B. (1993). Religion's role in adjustment to a negative life event: Coping with the loss of a child. *Journal Of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(4), 812-821.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002a). Assessing and Evaluating Qualitative Research. In S. B. Merriam and Associates (Ed.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 18-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002b). Introduction to Qualitative Research. In S. B. Merriam and Associates (Ed.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 3-17). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mertens, D. M. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miller, W. R., & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). Spirituality, religion, and health: An emerging research field. *The American Psychologist*, 58(1), 24-35.
- Molnar, B. E., Buka, S. L., & Kessler, R. C. (2001). Child sexual abuse and subsequent psychopathology: Results from the national comorbidity survey. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(5), 753-760.
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counselling psychology. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52, 250-260.
- Morrow, S. L. (2007). Qualitative research in counselling psychology: Conceptual foundations. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35(2), 209-235.
- Morrow, S. L., & Smith, M. L. (1995). Constructions of survival and coping by women who have survived childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 42(1), 24-33.

- Morrow, S. L., & Smith, M. L. (2000). Qualitative research for counselling psychology. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Handbook of counselling psychology* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13-22.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. London: Sage.
- Murray-Swank, N., A., & Pargament, K. I. (2005). God, where are you?: Evaluating a spiritually-integrated intervention for sexual abuse. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 8(3), 191-203.
- Narayanasamy, A. (2004). Spiritual coping mechanisms in chronic illness: A qualitative study. *British Journal of Nursing*, 11, 1461-1470.
- Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.
- Neumann, D. A., Houskamp, B. M., Pollock, V. E., & Briere, J. (1996). The long-term sequelae of childhood abuse in women: A meta-analytic review. *Child Maltreatment*, 1(1), 6-16.
- Nkongho, N. (2006). *Religious coping among sexually abused adolescent girls: A phenomenological investigation*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT). (3218322)
- Oaksford, K. & Frude, N. (2003). The process of coping following child sexual abuse: A qualitative study. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 12(2), 41-72.
- O'Dougherty Wright, M., Crawford, E., & Sebastian, K. (2007). Positive resolution of childhood sexual abuse experiences: The role of coping, benefit-finding and meaning-making. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22, 597-608.
- Oellerich, T. D. (2000). Rind, Tromovitch, and Bauserman: Politically incorrect – Scientifically correct. *Sexuality and Culture*, 4(2), 67-81.
- Oddone Paolucci, E. O., Genuis, M. L., & Violato, C. (2001). A meta-analysis of the published research on the effects of child sexual abuse. *The Journal of Psychology* 135(1), 17-36.
- Undersma, S. J., Chaffin, M., Berliner, L., Cordon, I., Goodman, G. S., & Barnett, D. (2001). Sex with children is abuse: Comment on Rind, Tromovitch, and Bauserman (1998). *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(6), 707-714.

- Pargament, K. I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pargament, K. I. (1999). The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 9(1), 3-16.
- Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. M., (2000). The many methods of religious coping: Development and initial validation of the RCOPE. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56(4), 519-543.
- Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., Tarakeshwar, N., & Hahn, J. (2001). Religious struggle as a predictor of mortality among medically ill elderly patients: A two-year longitudinal study. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 161, 1881-1885.
- Pargament, K. I., Smith, B. W., & Koenig, H. G. (1996). Religious coping with the Oklahoma city bombing: The brief RCOPE. *Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto*.
- Pargament, K. I., Smith, B. W., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. (1998). Patterns of positive and negative religious coping with major life stressors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37(4), 710-724.
- Pargament, K. I., Tarakeshwar, N., Ellison, C. G., & Wulff, K. M. (2001). Religious coping among the religious: The relationships between religious coping and well-being in a national sample of Presbyterian clergy, elders, and members. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40(3), 497-513.
- Pargament, K. I., Zinnbauer, B. J., Scott, A. B., Butter, E. M., Zerowin, J., & Stanik, P. (1998). Red flags and religious coping: Identifying some religious warning signs among people in crisis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 54(1), 77-89.
- Parker, S. (2009). Spirituality in counselling: A faith development perspective. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 89(1), 112-119.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peters, R. DeV. (2005). A community-based approach to promoting resilience in young children, their families, and their neighbourhoods. In R. D. Peters, B. Leadbeater, & R. J. McMahon (Eds.), *Resilience in children, families, and communities: Linking context to practice and policy* (pp. 157-176). New York: Kluwer.

- Peters, D. S., Wyatt, G. E., & Finkelhor, D. (1986). Prevalence. In D. Finkelhor, S. Araji, L. Baron, A. Browne, S. D. Peters, & G. E. Wyatt (Eds.), *A sourcebook on child sexual abuse* (pp. 15-59). CA: Sage.
- Pilgrim, D. (2006). Age. In C. Feltham & I. Horton (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of counselling and psychotherapy* (2nd ed.) (pp. 32-36). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle and S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52, 137-145.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counselling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal Of Counselling Psychology*, 52(2), 126-136.
- Post, B. C., & Wade, N. G. (2009). Religion and spirituality in psychotherapy: A practice-friendly review of research. *Journal of Clinical Psychology: In Session*, 65(2), 131-146.
- Public Health Agency of Canada. (2002). *Adult survivors of child sexual abuse: Overview paper*. Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/publications/nfntsxagrsexadult-eng.php>
- Public Health Agency of Canada. (2010). *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008: Major Findings*. Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cm-vee/csca-ecve/2008/index-eng.php>
- Putnam, F. W., (2003). Ten-year research update review: Child sexual abuse. *Journal of American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(3), 269-278.
- Reason, P. (1993). Sacred experience and sacred science. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 2, 10-27.
- Reinert, D. F., & Smith, C. E. (1997). Childhood sexual abuse and female spiritual development. *Counselling & Values*, 41(3), 235-246.
- Richards, L. & Morse, J. M. (2007). *ReadMe first for a user's guide to qualitative methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rind, B., Tromovitch, P., & Bauserman, R. (1998). A meta-analytic examination of assumed properties of child sexual abuse using college samples. *Psychological Bulletin*, 124(1), 22-53.

- Roberts, S. J., Reardon, K. M., & Rosenfeld, S. (1999). Childhood sexual abuse: Surveying its impact on primary care. *AWHONN Lifelines*, 3(1), 39-45.
- Rutter, M. (1993). Resilience: Some conceptual considerations. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 14(8), 626-631.
- Sanderson, C. (2006). *Counselling adult survivors of child sexual abuse*. (3rd ed.). London, GB: Jessica Kingsley.
- Schetky, D. (1990). A review of the literature on the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse. In R. P. Kluft (Ed), *Incest related syndromes of adult psychopathology* (pp. 35-54).
- Secombe, K. (2002). "Beating the odds" versus "changing the odds": Poverty, resilience, and family policy. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(2), 384-394.
- Seng, J. S., Low, L. K., Sparbel, K. J. H., & Killion, C. (2004). Abuse-related post-traumatic stress during the childbearing year. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 46(6), 604-613.
- Seybold, K. S., & Hill, P. C. (2001). The role of religion and spirituality in mental and physical health. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 10(1), 21-24.
- Shaw, A., Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2005). Religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth: a systematic review. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 8(1), 1-11.
- Siegel, K. & Schrimshaw, E. W. (2002). The perceived benefits of religious and spiritual coping among older adults living with HIV/AIDS. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41(1), 91-102.
- Sigmon, S. T., Greene, M. P., Rohan, K. J., & Nichols, J. E. (1996). Coping and adjustment in male and female survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 5(3), 57-75.
- Smith, M., & Kelly, L. (2001). The journey of recovery after a rape experience. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 22(4), 337-352.
- Smith, B. W., Pargament, K. I., Brant, C., & Oliver, J. M. (2000). Noah revisited: Religious coping by church members and the impact of the 1993 Midwest flood. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28, 169-186.
- Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking out again*. London: Routledge.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

- Swanston, H. Y., Plunkett, A. M., O'Toole, B. I., Shrimpton, S., Parkinson, P. N., & Oates, R. K. (2003). Nine years after child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 27, 967-984
- The Canadian Press (2008, June 3). Almost a quarter of Canadians don't believe in any god, new poll says. *CBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/06/03/f-religion-poll.html>
- Thompson, M. P., & Vardaman, P. J. (1997). The role of religion in coping with the loss of a family member to homicide. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 44-51.
- Thuné-Boyle, I. C., Stygall, J. A., Keshtgar, M., R., Newman, S. P. (2006). Do religious/spiritual coping strategies affect illness adjustment in patients with cancer? A systematic review of the literature. *Social Science and Medicine*, 63, 151-164.
- Ullman, S. E., & Filipas, H. H. (2005). Gender differences in social reactions to abuse disclosures, post-abuse coping, and PTSD of child sexual abuse survivors. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(2005), 767-782.
- Ungar, M. (2005). Introduction. In M. Ungar (Ed.), *Handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts* (pp. xv-xxxix). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 218-235.
- Ungar, M., Brown, M., Liebenberg, L., Cheung, M., & Levine, K. (2008). Distinguishing differences in pathways to resilience among Canadian youth. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 27(1), 1-13.
- Valentine, L., & Feinauer, L. L. (1993). Resilience factors associated with female survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 21(3), 216-224.
- Valle, R. S., & King, M. (1978). An introduction to existential-phenomenological thought in psychology. In R. S. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 3-17). New York: Oxford Press.
- van der Kolk, B. A. (1987). *Psychological trauma*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. London, Ont.: Althouse Press.
- van Manen, M. (1994). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.

- Walker, M. (2006). Sexual abuse in childhood. In C. Feltham & I. Horton (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of counselling and psychotherapy* (2nd ed.) (pp. 463-468). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Webster, R. E. (2001). Symptoms and long-term outcomes for children who have been sexually assaulted. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38(6), 533-547.
- Webster, D. C., & Dunn, E. C. (2005). Feminist perspectives on trauma. *Women & Therapy*, 28(3), 111-142.
- Wertz, F. J. (2005). Phenomenological research methods for counselling psychology. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52, 167-177.
- West, W. (2004). *Spiritual issues in therapy – Relating experience to practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Willows, J. (2009). *Moving on after childhood sexual abuse: Understanding the effects and preparing for therapy*. Great Britain: Routledge.
- Worthen, V. E. (2002). Phenomenological research and the making of meaning. In Sharan B. Merriam and Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp.139-141). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Zinnbauer, B. J., Pargament, K. I., Cole, B., Rye, M. S., Butter, E. M., Belavich, T. G., . . . Kadar, J. L. (1997). Religion and spirituality: Unfuzzifying the fuzzy. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36(4), 549-564.
- Zinnbauer, B. J., Pargament, K. I., & Scott, A. B. (1999). The emerging meanings of religiousness and spirituality: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Personality*, 67(6), 889-919.

Are you a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and have experienced spiritual coping?

Would you be willing to share your experiences in confidential research interviews?

I am a Masters Student in the School & Counselling Psychology program at the University of Saskatchewan.

I am currently conducting research to understand how spiritual coping is experienced by survivors of childhood sexual abuse. My research is being supervised by Dr. Stephanie Martin, a registered psychologist.

I am seeking volunteers to participate in 2 interviews, each approximately 1-2 hours in length.



In order to participate, volunteers must:

- A) Be female
- B) Be at least 18 years of age
- C) Be fluent in English
- D) Have experienced abuse prior to age 16
- E) Have experienced current or past counselling
- F) Have experienced spiritual coping

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact Angie at spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

Thank you for your interest

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT POSTER

**Are you a survivor of childhood sexual abuse
and have experienced spiritual coping?**

Would you be willing to share your experiences
in confidential research interviews?

I am a Masters Student in the School &
Counselling Psychology program at the
University of Saskatchewan, currently
conducting research to understand how
spiritual coping is experienced by
survivors of childhood sexual abuse.
My research is being supervised by
Dr. Stephanie Martin, a registered
psychologist.

I am seeking volunteers to participate in 2 interviews, each approximately 1-2 hours in length.

In order to participate, volunteers must:

- be female
- be at least 18 years of age
- be fluent in English
- have experienced abuse prior to age 16
- have experienced current or past counselling
- have experienced spiritual coping

If you are interested in learning more about this study,
please contact Angie at spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

Thank you for your interest

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

CSA & Spiritual Coping
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

APPENDIX C: TELEPHONE SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPATION CRITERIA

R: Thank you for expressing interest in the research project. The purpose of this investigation is to learn more about how women deal with childhood sexual abuse. I want to be sure that all participants are safe right now. That is why I require that you are over the age of 18, that the abuse is no longer occurring, and that you are currently or have previously received some counselling. Now I just want to confirm that you meet participation criteria. First of all, are you 18 years or older?

R: And did you experience sexual abuse as a child?

R: Were you 16 or younger when you were abused?

R: Have you ever or are you currently going to counselling for your abuse?

R: Have you ever experienced spiritual coping?

R: Great, now that we have covered the participation criteria, I would like to set up a time to meet with you and to hear about your experiences. I have an interview room at the U of S campus available; do you require directions and/or bus tickets in order to meet?

R: At our first meeting we will go over informed consent. Our meeting will last approximately 1 ½ hours. Following the first interview, we will meet one more time in order to review your transcript and discuss themes that have been generated from your interview. This meeting will also be approximately 1 ½ hours in length.

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Participant Information Form

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Today's Date: _____ Age: _____

Relationship Status (please circle one):

- a. Single
- b. Married/Common-Law
- c. Separated/Divorces
- d. Widowed
- e. Other _____

Present Living Situation (please circle one):

- a. On my own
- b. With a partner and/or children
- c. With my parent(s)
- d. With a roommate
- e. Other _____

Highest Level of Education (please circle one):

- a. Partial high school
- b. High school
- c. Partial college or university
- d. Undergraduate degree
- e. Partial graduate degree
- f. Graduate degree
- g. Other _____

Employment Status (please circle one):

- a. Not employed
- b. Part-time employment
- c. Full-time employment
- d. Full-time student
- e. Other _____

Occupation: _____

Ethnic/Cultural Background: _____

Spiritual/Religious Affiliation: _____

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Exploring the experience of spiritual coping among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse.” Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researchers

Dr. Stephanie Martin
Associate Professor
College of Education,
University of Saskatchewan,
(306) 966-5259
stephanie.martin@usask.ca

Angela Dawn Wiebe
M.Ed. candidate
College of Education,
University of Saskatchewan
spiritual_coping@hotmail.com

Purpose and Procedure

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. The purpose of the research is to examine the lived experience(s) of women survivors of childhood sexual abuse and the essence of spirituality as a coping resource. This information could benefit other survivors, as well as counsellors and other helping professionals providing services to survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

You will be asked to participate in two interviews, each approximately 90 minutes in length, which will be audio-taped and transcribed. The interviews will be held at a convenient time and location, possibly the University of Saskatchewan campus or Tamara’s House. The style of the interview will be conversational in nature and the topic will be on your experiences of spiritual coping regarding your childhood sexual abuse.

A transcript of the first interview will be given to you for review in order to verify its accuracy. Any portions of the transcript that you do not want included will be removed. In addition, preliminary findings will also be shared for your review and you will be invited to provide feedback on these findings.

If you wish to receive a copy of the final research results, please email Angie at spiritual_coping@hotmail.com. Alternatively, you may access overall results of this study through the General Office of the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education in the fall of 2010.

Potential Benefits

There are no direct personal benefits to participating in this study. However, some individuals who have taken part in similar research have found the process to be somewhat healing and therapeutic. This study may also benefit the wider community, particularly survivors of childhood sexual abuse, by contributing to our understanding of the experiences that facilitate spiritual coping of women survivors of childhood sexual abuse. It is important to note that these benefits are potential benefits only and are not guaranteed.

Potential Risks

It is important to note that the researchers have measures in place to maintain confidentiality, and you have the right to refrain from answering any question that makes you feel uncomfortable and the right to withdraw from the project at any point. A potential risk of participation in this study

may involve the revisiting of sensitive and painful memories regarding the experience of childhood sexual abuse. While it is not anticipated that you will experience distress, some people find discussing topics related to their sexual abuse difficult. If issues of a sensitive nature arise as a result of participating in this study, you will be provided with referrals to low or no cost counselling agencies in your community.

Storage of Data

All data reported as aggregate themes and data records, including the interview questionnaires, tapes, transcriptions and research documents will be stored separately from the signed consent forms in a locked cabinet in Dr. Stephanie Martin's office at the University of Saskatchewan. The data will be stored for five years after the study is completed upon which time they will be destroyed. This is all done to ensure your privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Confidentiality

The data from this study will be reported in a Master's thesis, with the possibility of being submitted for publication in academic journals, and presented at conferences. The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information you share in this study is confidential.

At the beginning of the study, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (an alias or fake name). All written records in the study, including transcripts, will refer to you only by your pseudonym. When reporting the findings, the researchers will attempt to identify common themes to reduce the potential for you to be identified by others based on what you have said. When reporting the characteristics of the participants in the participants' section of the thesis document, the researchers will only include those characteristics that are essential to the purpose of the study.

Although the researchers will report direct quotations from the individual interviews and group discussion, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts, to alter your quotations as you see fit, and give permission for these quotations to be used.

Right to Withdraw

Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed

only with the research team. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort including access to services. If you withdraw from the research project, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request up until the point at which the data/ transcript release form has been signed.

Questions

If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Follow-Up or Debriefing

If you would like to find out about the results of the research project, you may contact either researcher at the numbers or email addresses provided.

Consent to Participate

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Thank you for your interest in this study.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW #1 GUIDE

Date/Time of Interview:

Location of the Interview:

Participant Coding #:

Note: These guiding interview questions are intended to be open ended and will be mainly used to elicit participant accounts of experiences of spiritual coping. Follow-up questions will be asked to obtain more detail and allow for personal experiences to be shared fully. The following questions may not necessarily be asked in this order during the interview process.

Questions:

1. How has the experience of childhood sexual abuse affected you?
2. What are some of the things you did to help you deal with the sexual abuse? What did you do (or think) differently to try and deal with the abuse?
3. Have you experienced spirituality within your coping? What was that experience like for you? What does spirituality mean to you?
 - a. How did your spirituality make dealing with the sexual abuse harder?
 - b. How did your spirituality make dealing with the sexual abuse easier?
 - c. Has your spirituality changed as a result of the sexual abuse? If so, how?

APPENDIX G: REFERRAL HANDOUT

If you are experiencing distress, or need someone to talk to, please consider seeking support at one of the following support agencies. All of these agencies provide no-cost or low-cost counselling.

24-hour crisis line number

Saskatoon Sexual Assault and Information Centre: 244-2224

Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Services: 933-6200

Adult Community Services

Address: 4th Floor

715 Queen Street

Saskatoon, SK S7K 4X4

Phone: 655-7950

Website: http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/ps_mh_adult_community.htm

Catholic Family Services of Saskatoon

Address: 200 - 506 - 25th Street East

Saskatoon, SK S7K 4A7

Phone: 244-7773

Email: staff@cfssaskatoon.sk.ca

Family Service Saskatoon

Address: 506 25th Street East

Saskatoon, SK S7K 4A7

Phone: 244-0127

Website: www.familyservice.sk.ca

Saskatoon Christian Counselling

Address: 617 3rd Ave. N.

Saskatoon, SK S7K 2J8

Phone: 244-9890

Website: <http://www.saskatoonchristiancounsellingservices.com/>

Saskatoon Sexual Assault and Information Centre

Address: 201 - 506 25th Street East

Saskatoon, SK S7K 4A7

Phone: 244-2294

Student Counselling Services (for U of S students only)

Address: University of Saskatchewan

104 Qu'Appelle Hall Addition

Saskatoon, SK S7N 5E8

Phone: 244-4920

Hours: Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. (closed over noon hour May to August)

Tamara's House

Address: 1605 Victoria Avenue

Saskatoon, SK S7H 1Z4

Phone: 683-8667 or 1-877-626-1222

Website: www.tamarashouse.sk.ca

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW #2 GUIDE

Date/Time of Interview:

Location of the Interview:

Participant Coding #:

Questions:

1. Have you had an opportunity to review your transcript that I sent you? If so, do you have any changes that you would like to make to it? You may add, delete, or change anything that you are not completely comfortable with.

2. Next, I would like you to please look at this short paragraph I wrote. I have tried to summarize what you told me about how you dealt with the sexual abuse, specifically the spiritual coping you described. I want to make sure I did not miss anything or get anything wrong. Is there anything in this paragraph you would change?

3. I want to thank you for your participation in this study. Your message has been very valuable in helping us to learn more about how women cope spiritually in regards to their child sexual abuse. When the study is finished, I will contact you with a copy of the final results, and you may also find it online.

APPENDIX I: DATA/TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

Exploring the experience of spiritual coping among women survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

I, _____, have reviewed the summaries of my personal interviews in this study, and have had the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the actual transcripts. I acknowledge that the summary accurately reflects what I said in my personal interviews with Angela D. Wiebe. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Angela D. Wiebe to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher